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Date: 15th February, 2023

Attention: Chairman
Special Parliamentary Committee on 2022 General Elections
PNG National Parliament
Post Office, Parliament House, Waigani

Dear Chairman and Committee,

Subject: Submission for Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 General Elections

This submission focuses on the main findings of a nine-month assessment of the transparency and openness of election data in the PNG 2022 National General Elections'. This assessment was carried out by seven members of the Political Science Strand at the University of Papua New Guinea. This submission has been submitted by Russel Kitau, Tutor of Political Science at UPNG, on behalf of the team, and has been authorized at the strand level for submission.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the only country in the Pacific to sign onto the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2015, and adopted commitments to improve access to information of public interest. PNG's public institutions such as the PNG Electoral Commission are required, under OGP, to make election data public when elections are underway, as well as curating online repositories of past election data. "Election data" refers to information relating to aspects of the process throughout the electoral cycle. The right to information is integral to electoral rights because it is impossible to participate meaningfully without information needed to make informed electoral choices. However, the 2021 report Promoting Election Integrity in the Pacific Island Countries, shows that in PNG election data was not open for the entire electoral process except for Electoral complaints, disputes and resolutions, and the Electoral legal framework, which were "mostly open", followed by Political Party Registration, which was "partially open."

Following the 2021 Promoting Election Integrity report, we conducted an observation and analysis on PNG's election data openness throughout the 2022 election to evaluate the transparency and openness of public-interest data related to the 2022 National General Election. The Political Science Department of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), with technical and financial assistance from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), identified 15 electoral processes to be monitored from December 2021 to October 2022. The electoral processes monitored included: electoral legal framework, electoral management body (EMB) and its administration, election management processes, electoral boundaries, electoral security, political party registration, ballot qualification, election campaigns, campaign finance, voter registration, voter list, voter education, polling stations, election results, and electoral complaints, disputes and resolutions.

These 15 electoral processes were measured against minimum standards of transparency derived from Open Government Partnership (OGP) principles. These open data principles

include: availability of data for free on the internet; granularity (data is available to the finest level); completeness (data is for all items at once); analysability (data is available in CSV or Excel); non-proprietary (no organisation has exclusive control); non-discriminatory (e.g. no registration required to access data); license free (data is open for re-use); permanently available (data available for indefinite period); and timeliness (timely information).

A scoring algorithm was used to calculate data openness which allocated six points for data availability, three points each for granularity, completeness, analysability, and one point each for non-proprietary, non-discriminatory, license-free, permanency and timeliness principles. At the end of the scoring exercise, each process is given a score to determine its level of openness. For instance, a score equal to or less than 30% classifies data as not open; between 31% and 70% as partially open; and above 70% as mostly open. See the report for a discussion on methodology.

Table 1. Summary of Election Openness Data

Process	Assessment
Election Management Body and Administration	Partially open
Election Management Body Processes	Not open
Electoral boundaries	Partially open
Election security	Partially open
Political Party Registration	Partially open
Ballot Qualification	Not open
Election campaign	Not open
Campaign finance	Not open
Voter registration	Not open
Voter lists	Partially open
Voter education	Partially open
Polling Stations	Not open
Election results	Partially open
Electoral Complaints, Disputes and Resolutions	Partially open
Electoral Legal Framework	Mostly open

Similar to the 2021 Promoting Election Integrity report, our findings shows that only the "Electoral Legal Framework" meets the data openness requirement of the Open Government Partnership out of the 15 electoral processes monitored. Whilst the Promoting Election

Integrity report categorises "Electoral Complaints, Disputes and Resolutions" as mostly open, we categorised it as partially open. This is because immediately following the election, the information on disputed results were not updated in a timely manner. We found that eight other processes also fall under the 'partially open' category, which seems like an improvement from the 2021 Promoting Election Integrity report. However, the reason why there seems to be an improvement is because our observation coincided with the election period, and there was some sort of attempt by the relevant government departments to make electoral data available online. Six of the processes observed still remain under the "not open" category. From our observations, the following seem to be the reasons for such poor results:

Low levels of education, access to information, and demand for election data have put little pressure on key bodies to make election data available to the public. Additionally, there is slow uptake of online connectivity and making information available online. For instance, there was hardly any official data on security incidents especially which is key to assessing how ethnic fragmentation and other interrelated factors continue to drive high levels of election-related violence.

While key legislation is publicly available, public awareness remains low. Similarly, the new Voter Look-Up system is a welcome innovation, but its implementation should be strengthened to be broadly utilized by voters.

Challenges in gaining access to data from public institutions with key roles in the election indicate a prevalent culture of reluctance to release information of public interest, and budget and campaign finance data seemed to be the most difficult to obtain.

A lack of funding has affected the preparedness of the EMB to deliver the election and ensure that key data is made available to all stakeholders—including candidates, voters, and observers—in a timely manner. However, poor management and limited technical capacity also contributed to ineffective and untimely implementation of electoral activities, such publishing new electoral boundaries and the polling schedule.

Access to information about electoral processes, including government held electoral data, and the steps taken by governmental institutions to establish accountability in the electoral context is fundamental to creating and reinforcing public confidence in the integrity of elections and the government that derives from them. It also enhances voter education, dissuades disinformation, and improves the link between citizens and government.

Several recommendations have been put forward with the aim of addressing the challenges mentioned above. The recommendations are as follows;

- Recommendations for Government and lawmakers includes prioritizing election fundings for next elections, relevant public departments to strengthen OGP through working to ensure openness of election data, and conducting a nationwide census prior to the next elections to address inaccuracy issues with the electoral roll experienced in the 2022 elections.
- Recommendations for EMBs include timely communication for voter registration sites per LLGs, to increase voter education and awareness, and prioritize the timely and regular update of election information via the EMB official website.
- Recommendations for partners, NGOs, and other civil society organizations include support to government and citizen efforts to enhance actions for open election data

through technical or financial assistance, provide support to efforts of EMBs in terms of education and awareness on voting and electoral processes, and maintain a continuous public forum through the media discussing election-related issues to maintain public awareness and maintain pressure on sitting government to address these issues through policy making or amending of laws.

- Recommendations for voters highlights the need to increase demand for more data to be made public and take on personal obligations to spread awareness on the need for available, timely and updated election data. Recommendations also include that voters need to increase demand for political parties or independent candidates to make their campaign finances available and in detail to the public before contesting.

Contact persons for this submission can be contacted via the following contact details; Russel Kitau @ phone: 73032173 & email: dankay730@gmail.com or Michael Kabuni @ mkabuni@gmail.com

Thank you for your consideration

Yours Faithfully,

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