VOTES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

EXAMPLE GUIDANCE ON RESPONSE TEAM PROTOCOLS FOR ELECTION DAY INCIDENTS

GENDER WOMEN DEMOCRACY

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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Overall Guidance:

This tool provides one example of how an observer group may respond to incidents of VAW-E via a response team. The purpose of a response team is to act on incidents of violence as needed when they are reported, to collect information about the event and to connect victims with services and referral systems as necessary.

A response team can be made up of responders on the ground and a coordinating committee that receives notification of incidents and decides which require response. More information on the stakeholders to engage in such a response effort can be found in the guidance below.

Important Information for Response Teams:

- Response teams should coordinate ahead of time to ensure that all members are aware of their responsibilities and the response methodology in the event of violent acts against women on election day. They also should make sure that each team member has contact information for the whole team and other stakeholders.
- Response teams should determine in advance what information should be collected to ensure appropriate response from relevant stakeholders in the event of violence. They should also build relationships with these stakeholders ahead of time and establish coordinated response procedures.

The following steps show how a citizen observation group can structure a rapid response. Groups should adapt them to fit their own needs and context.

Response Protocol Steps: From Incidents to Verification

1. When a response team member learns about an incident, he or she should take down relevant information about the municipality or ward and polling unit, and, most important, information about the incident, perpetrator(s) and victim(s).
2. A response team member will share this information via text or phone with the coordinating committee.
3. The coordinating committee will review each incident quickly to determine if there is an immediate need to pass the incident on to a different stakeholder, such as the police or electoral management body, or if there is a need for further follow up.
4. The coordinating committee will determine, based on the type or location of the incident, who should be contacted to ensure the incident is properly addressed.
5. Each person on the Response Committee should have an assigned role. Some sample roles—which may be separated, combined, omitted or built upon, depending on an observation group's context—include:
    - *A designated person to receive the information and record data about the incident on a spreadsheet*
    - *A designated person to call back the person who reported the incident to verify and gather additional details on the incident if needed*

- *A designated person to report incidents to relevant stakeholders, including police or security forces, the election management body, etc.*
- *If necessary and where possible, response teams should send two members to the location of the incident to follow up and verify it, and ensure a proper response has been provided by security forces, the electoral management body or others. This should be done only after ensuring the safety of the response teams doing so.*
- *A designated person to enter into the database information about how each incident was addressed*

Stakeholders to include in a response effort:

When training a rapid response team, a citizen election observation group should clearly establish which stakeholders to contact in particular situations in order to streamline the response effort and ensure that incidents are referred to the stakeholder best placed to respond. These stakeholders may include:

- ***National security forces:*** in the case of weapon-related violence, for example
- ***Police:*** in the case of non-weapon-related violence, for example
- ***Election management body:*** including gender desk officers; when incidents involve electoral administrators as victims or perpetrators of violence
- ***Civil society:*** including any local "situation rooms" or other election-related networks or organizations
- ***Service providers:*** who can provide advice on registering a legal complaint and filing charges, or who can provide physical, psychological or medical assistance, or shelters, when possible
- When dealing with service providers:
  - Contact the victim, when possible, and refer her directly to any provider who may be able to help.
  - Separately, contact the provider organization directly and let it know a victim has been referred.
  - **It is up to the victim to determine if she wants to seek assistance and to call the provider herself.**
- ***Political parties or organizations:*** may need to be contacted when one of their members has been the victim of an incident of violence. Where parties have established their own response mechanisms, response teams may wish to request that the parties check on the victim.

The first and most important responsibility of the response team is to refer an incident to the right stakeholder for response. Once this is completed, and if there is time, team members can also go to the polling station to verify or call back for verification depending on the incident and location and safety of the environments. The process should be clearly established, and all response members should be trained in it before election day.

One example of the process following the notification of relevant stakeholders might be to:

1. Call the victim back and verify and collect details by phone about the type of violence, and details about the victim(s) and perpetrator(s), such as whether they were voters, election officials, etc.
2. Go to the scene to verify and investigate the incident to confirm the critical details, including perpetrator(s) identity, victim(s) identity, type of violence, aim of the act of violence and impact of the violence.
3. Interview people involved, if possible and if it does not put them or the response team in danger. If it is safe to do so, take pictures for documentation purposes.
4. Verify that the victim response stakeholders that were called have responded and supported the victim.

Media

Response teams may wish to do media interviews. If they do, they must not reveal any identifying information about the victim, the incident or the verification process that would put someone in danger.