

**Communiqué issued at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Forum of the Anti-Corruption Situation Room, held on Wednesday, 10 April 2019 at Rockview Hotel, Abuja  
With the theme - Vote Trading and Other Electoral Corruption in the 2019 General Elections: Setting Agenda for Prosecution and Reforms.**

## Background

Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 after decades of military rule. Since 1999, Nigeria has successfully held five successive transitions without major hitches of military interference;

Nigeria, West Africa's regional power has recorded progress in various social, cultural and economic spheres in the face of emerging hurdles which have the potential of withering down or clouding the gains of yesteryears, the chief factor being corruption in the electoral process.

Concerned about the need to deepen democracy and the rule of law in Nigeria in the context of elections and sustainable development, civil society groups have a major role to play in ensuring the elimination of corruption associated with elections in Nigeria.

The Human and Environmental Agenda (HEDA Resource Centre) in collaboration with Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) National Orientation Agency (NOA), Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL) Technical Unit on Governance and Anti-Corruption Reform (TUGAR) with the support of Strengthening Citizens' Resistance Against the Prevalence of Corruption of ACTIONAID and MacArthur Foundation therefore held the 9th edition of Anti-Corruption Situation Room, (ACSR) in Abuja beginning from April 10 to 12, 2019 at the Rockview Hotel in Abuja .

Participants at the forum included the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) represented by its Federal Commissioner, Festus Okoye; the Inspector

General of Police, (IG) represented by the AIG, Peter Ogunyanwo, the Nigerian Labour Congress, (NLC) represented by its President Ayuba Wabba; erudite lawyer, Mr Femi Falana, (SAN), representatives of Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Offenses Commission, (ICPC), the media, human right groups and Community-Based Associations, (CBOs).

Participants after the presentation of papers and exhaustive debate observed that corruption in the electoral process remain a major impediment to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Some of the identified elements of corruption in the electoral process are vote trading in its various forms. Participants identified the challenge an old problem in Nigeria dating back to the 1960s and that this has been consistently witnessed in subsequent elections.

However, in recent times vote buying has assumed the status of a 'culture', a way of life and a pattern in the electoral process. Each election continues to witness dwindling fortunes in terms of the degree, audacity and boldness employed by politicians to procure votes from the electorate;

Participants expressed deep concern about the increasing cases of this menace and the impact on good governance, disturbed that vote-buying has become institutionalised across the country and imbibed by the mainstream political parties;

There were grave concerns that corruption in the electoral system comes in different ways including but not limited to vote buying through cash ranging between 500 naira to 10,000 naira but also included provision of emergency social amenities in election seasons, offering of essential food items to voters before or during the election; exorbitant sales of nomination forms, money-guzzling; community collective inducements; organised reward system during the election; buying and warehousing of Voters Card before the election for vote-trading. Others include surrendering PVC to political cartels as precondition to access social amenities, buying of party agents of other political parties and asking voters to plead ignorance or illiteracy in order for them to be teleguided.

That Vote Trading violates section 130 of the Electoral Act 2010 ( as amended) it destroys freewill and credible choice of the electorate, it also impugns the age-long values and heritage of the society apart from plunging the country into moral degeneration.

Contributors uphold that vote buying impedes qualitative governance, fuels official corruption, destroys mutual trust between the government and the electorate, aids the politics of exclusion and in fact remains an inducement to poverty, cultural and social misery, violence and extremism. Vote trading also reserves the ability to contest elections for the rich many of whose sources of wealth remain questionable.

That vote trading and other Acts of Electoral Corruption in the 2019 General Elections and in the past electoral processes pose a great danger to democratic development, good governance and sustainable livelihood in Nigeria.

In order to stop vote-trading and other Acts of Electoral Corruption, participants thereby make the following recommendations to stakeholders being INEC, the National Assembly, the Presidency, the Security Agencies, Traditional institutions and the Electorate.

- That Nigerians need to be mobilised and sensitised against vote trading as a remarkable step to deepening democracy and the Rule of law. This should involve collaboration from Labour, civil society and other stakeholders for a concerted effort;
- The electoral law reform should be strengthened to isolate vote buying as a major item which should attract stiffer penalties like long years of imprisonment and banning from participation in future elections for a number of years that are deterrent enough;

- That INEC should introduce electronic voting with the aim of eliminating vote-trading apart from making the voting process more secret and confidential.
- That INEC in collaboration with the police should prosecute those arrested in the last elections for vote-buying to serve as a deterrent to others and to guarantee transparency in future elections.