

NIGERIA

FIGHTING INFORMATION MANIPULATION: THE ROLE OF FACT-CHECKERS

The EU EOM in Nigeria reinforced the crucial role of fact-checkers in verifying online content, protecting the integrity of information and helping voters to make an informed choice on election day.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) deployed in Nigeria for the 2023 general elections monitored closely the social media environment and content related to the elections and the political campaign, highlighting both online risks and the critical role of local fact-checkers.

During the 2023 elections in Nigeria, information manipulation became a **threat to the democratic process**. Fake news and rumours flooded various social media platforms, used by around 36 million of Nigerians. Altered images, fabricated quotes, and conspiracy theories targeted at presidential candidates and public institutions, undermined trust and raised fears of violence. When Nigerian civil society organisations realised how dangerous information manipulation could be in the political context, they decided to take action and formed the Nigerian Fact-checkers Coalition (NFC).

Fact-checkers are crucial in assessing and verifying content to provide the public with independent, accurate, and reliable information, protecting the integrity of information and helping voters to make a well-informed decision on election day. **Freedom of expression allows individuals to express opinions and ideas without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information through various mediums.** These are core values rooted in the human rights, and assessed by the EU EOMs.

In its final report, the EU EOM underlined the role of the Nigerian Fact-checkers Coalition (NFC) – formed by 12 separate civil society and media organisations, including Dubawa, Africa Check, FactCheckHub, ICIR, CJID, Premium Times, Daily Trust, and TheCable – which tackled a large amount of

false online content and contributed to raising awareness on the dangers of disinformation.

“The fact that observers paid attention to social media showed just how central these platforms have become to our democracy”, said Mr Opeyemi Kehinde, FactCheckHub editor, who also leads the NFC. “It sent a message that what happens online matters - and that it can shape real-world outcomes. Knowing the EU EOM was watching gave additional recognition to our efforts and highlighted the importance of credible, coordinated fact-checking during the elections”, he added.

In its assessment, the EU EOM recognised the role of Social Media as an important campaigning and mobilisation tool for candidates, offering a platform for citizens to express their views, stimulating the debate. However, the EU EOM also observed that those platforms were used by political factions to create false impressions of support or to attack opponents, as well as to spread false information.

This coalition of Nigerian fact-checkers worked across platforms to counter and combat electoral disinformation, contributing to public trust and to the integrity of the electoral process. People turned to social media networks to verify suspicious reports, and national TV stations started using the coalition's verified facts during debates and news broadcasts.

EU EOM reported that coordination between many organisations helped them optimise their capacities and resources. They worked together across different regions of Nigeria and in the diverse languages, sharing tools and information to counter the falsehoods. The fact-checkers set up situation rooms in the cities of Abuja and Lagos, which were active 24 hours a day during the election period. They fact-checked presidential debates, campaign rallies, and viral social media posts live, quickly and accurately exposing information

manipulation. They worked in English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin, reflecting Nigeria's linguistic diversity.

“We formed the coalition because we realised that no single medium or organisation can do it alone and successfully,” added Mr Opeyemi Kehinde. *“Although it was not easy, as we have different organisations, each with its own internal house styles and work policy, we came together because disinformation knows no borders. The coalition meant speed, scale, and survival”*, he concluded.