



***Citizenship Certificate and Voter
Registration***

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**UNDP Electoral Support Project (ESP)
Election Commission of Nepal
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Citizenship Certificate and Voter Registration

1. Overview

All Nepali citizens are entitled to be issued with a Citizenship Certificate from the age of 16 and above. A citizenship certificate is required to access public benefits such as senior citizen, displaced persons, victims of armed conflict, or widow allowances. A Citizenship Certificate is also required to register marriage, to register land and property transactions, or to join public services such as army or police. The document is therefore considered the most essential legal identity document in Nepal.

Whilst other documents were once accepted as an alternative to the citizenship certificate to register as a voter or to vote in elections, recent drafted amendments to electoral laws now make the presentation of the citizenship certificate mandatory for electoral purposes.

Accurate and consistent statistics on citizenship certificate issuance are not available and therefore the percentage of eligible citizens who are undocumented is not easily determined. The official Government of Nepal estimate reports that 800,000 eligible citizens are without a certificate, but other surveys and estimates indicate anywhere between 1.6 to three million citizens without citizenship certificate.

2. Citizenship Certificate Process

To be issued with a citizenship certificate citizens must complete processes at both the VDC and CDO offices. The actual process and required documents may vary from office to office but essentially a recommendation letter is required from the VDC to enable further processing and certificate issuance at the CDO. The required documents may include birth certificate, migration certificate, marriage certificate if citizenship through marriage, and fathers or husbands certificate.

In cases where not all documents are available the VDC can prepare a deed of public inquiry which must include seven witnesses, each of whom submit their citizenship certificate.

To meet the anticipated increased demand created by the voter registration project, CDO are implementing a fast track service to assist citizens to be issued with certificated in time for voter registration. The current pilot of the voter registration process has indicated that some citizens have taken advantage of this service.

Due to distance and other geographic limitations some citizens may not have regular access to their VDC and CDO offices. For some citizens the CDO office may be one or more days walk from their locations which may make the process of being issued with citizenship certificated difficult.

Mobile registration campaigns have previously been conducted in remote locations, the last time being prior to the Constitutional Assembly elections.

3. Voter Registration Project

The new voter registration process will not only collect data for the voter list but will also form the basis of data collection for the new National ID project. The issuance of the National ID may effectively replace the current citizenship certificate. Therefore

registering as a voter is potentially the first step in registering for the replacement of the citizenship certificate.

The updated electoral law makes presentation of a valid citizenship certificate mandatory to enroll as a voter. This may have the potential to disenfranchise voters who meet eligibility requirements but remain undocumented.

4. Registration Process

The registration process provides several opportunities for prospective voters to ensure that they apply for and receive the appropriate documents for voter registration including citizenship certificate.

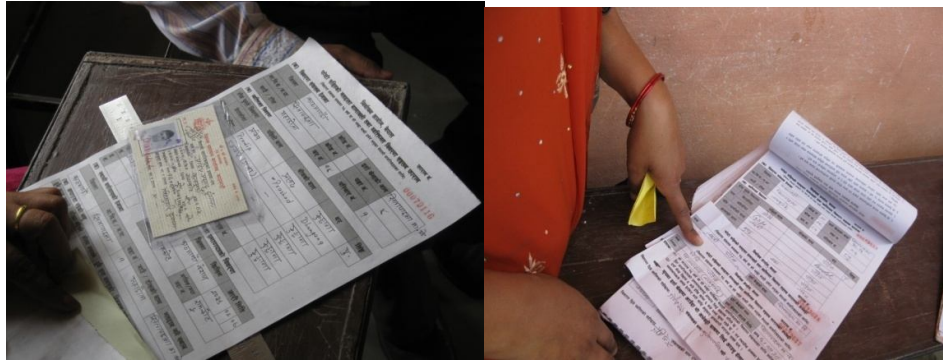
- Voter awareness – campaigns are conducted in each locality approximately 1 week prior to the commencement of door to door enumeration. The campaigns and materials are designed to inform voters of the process including the requirement for citizenship certificate for registration.

Citizens without certificates and wishing to register as a voter have the opportunity to attain a certificate before enumeration.

- Enumeration – each household is visited by enumerators approximately 1-2 weeks before opening of the registration center. The enumerator checks the citizenship certificate of voters wishing to register, assists with completion of the form, and hands the voter a receipt. The receipt informs the voter of the requirement to bring the certificate to the registration center.

Citizens wishing to register but who do not have a citizenship certificate at time of enumeration have the opportunity to attain a certificate before the opening of the registration center. They may then come to the registration center to complete registration.

- Registration – citizens will bring their enumeration receipt and citizenship certificate to the registration center. Their biometric information and data will be electronically captured. Citizens who were not enumerated but who have a citizenship certificate may report to the registration center to complete their registration form and be registered in a single process.



- Missed voters – a second registration exercise will be conducted in each area to provide citizens who were not at home during the initial registration to become registered. This second registration may be held at the VDC level rather than in each polling location.

Citizens who did not have a citizenship certificate during the initial registration but have attained one since may register at this time.

- District Office registration – each District Election Office (DEO) will be established as a point for continuous registration. Any citizen wishing to register may visit the DEO with their citizenship certificate during business hours to become registered as a voter.

Citizens must attend the CDO at district level to receive their citizenship certificate. They may at the same time as visiting the CDO, call into the DEO to complete voter registration. Eligible voters returning to their locality and who have missed the registration process may also register at the DEO at any time.

5. Recommendations

Voter registration data is to form the basis for the future National ID card and therefore the potential replacement for the current citizenship certificate. It must be recognized that the ECN has the mandate to register voters for election purposes, and the authorization for issuance of citizenship or National ID documents remains with the Ministry of Home.

The requirement for eligible voters to present their citizenship certificate for election related processes has been in place for some time, including during recent bi-elections. This requirement has not been questioned by the public, civil society, or political parties.

The major risk for voter registration and subsequent voting and civil registration functions is the risk of disenfranchising eligible voters through the lack of opportunity to attain a citizenship document in time for voter registration. To minimize this risk the following should be considered:

- A nationwide awareness campaign must be conducted to raise awareness of the link between citizenship certificate, voter registration, and potentially National Identity.
- VDC and CDO offices should implement a process of mobile citizen registration and certificate issuance ahead of the voter registration process.
- The local voter education campaigns must emphasize the requirement for citizenship certificate for voter enumeration and registration. The VDC and CDO organizations must work in a coordinated fashion at the local level to fast track citizenship certificate applications.
- Enumerators should be provided with a handout that may be provided to eligible voters without citizenship certificates. The handout should include:
 - Why the citizenship certificate is required for voter registration.
 - The link between voter registration and National ID.
 - How to get a citizenship certificate.
 - Advise the voter that if they can get a citizenship certificate prior to the closure of the registration center in their location that they may come to the center directly for registration.
 - Advise the voter that if they get a citizenship certificate they may register as a voter at their District Election Office at any time.
 - Advise the voter of the process for raising objections or disputes regarding the requirement for citizenship certificate for voter registration purposes.
- Statistics should be maintained of:
 - The number of eligible citizens met at households without citizenship certificates.
 - The number of eligible citizens reporting directly to registration centers including those who were not present at time of enumeration, and those with newly issued citizenship certificates.