

ANFREL FOUNDATION



109 Suthisarnwinichai Rd, Samsennok, Huaykwang, Bangkok 10320 Tel. (+66) 2277-3627, (+66) 2693-1867, (+66) 2694-3228, Fax. (+66) 2276-2183 <http://www.anfrel.org>

Election Observation Training for Civil Society Organisations and Election Monitoring Groups in Malaysia

Summary

The training on Election Observation in Kuala Lumpur from Jan 21 to Jan 23, 2013 was well received by the participants and almost all the participants who attended the training showed a keen interest in developing their skills in election observation. The training, which was reduced from five days to three days (following a pre-training discussion/assessment with members of the election observation coalition) covered the essential aspects of setting up an election observation mission (EOM), structures, deployment, working in teams and mobilizing volunteer observers, besides some other crucial functions like strategy building and information management. In all, about 21 participants attended the training. The trainees were from various organizations representing accredited and non-accredited groups under the banner of the Pemantau Pilihan Raya Rakyat (Pemantau).

The 3-day training provided sufficient opportunity to gauge the preparation of the Malaysian election observers representing their different organizations. At this point in time, there needs to be a clear-cut distinction between observing elections as observers following a standard and time-tested approach and creating a mass mobilisation through observation of the coming elections. The need for mass mobilisation during the current Malaysian elections is understandable given that the ruling coalition and the Election Commission have been accused of acting in a partisan manner and keeping things under tight control.

Under the present circumstances a meaningful mass mobilization can be certainly created and complemented well by election observers and volunteers who are provided a systematic plan that covers documentation, planned deployment of observers, coordination, planned logistics, security, information management (with proper verification techniques), Election-Day work flow and developing meaningful reports based on findings on the ground.

Most of the trainees expressed the need for additional similar training to reinforce their newly acquired knowledge of the basics. This does not come entirely as a surprise considering that most of the participants were first timers and without any experience, except for a few who had prior knowledge having been observers during previous elections in Malaysia or elsewhere.

The current group of trainers who attended the training, barring a few, do not seem to have mastered the skills of imparting training to others, such as their peers or observers from the different strata. In fact, given their present understanding of the electoral process, there appears to be a sincere need for further training to strengthen the efforts of these trainers to be able to train better and produce effective results. Herein the case

of Burma can best exemplify how training can make an impact. A domestic election observers network was set up only a few weeks before the April 1, 2012 by-elections and yet the report that was produced by the observers group was very professional in its approach and made a reasonable impact on the process. Members of the observers group, who were drawn mostly from ANFREL's training that took place until a couple of weeks before the elections, ensured that every single detail was covered through continuous training and reinforcement of newly acquired skills.

Although, there were times when it was felt that training may not help any further, ANFREL agreed to the demands of the local groups in Burma for "more trainings," which, in hindsight, proved more useful as they helped in fine-tuning the group's methodologies and complemented the efforts of other groups which were adopting a more activist approach. In a nutshell, what yet again proved to be true is that effective and professional election observation isn't instantly accomplished; rather it has to be given time to develop, which is possible with continuous training and practice of the art of observation.

In Burma, new ideas such as crowd sourcing and social media were used but what eventually served as a solid foundation and what acted as a reference for both the domestic and the international community in analysing the election results were the reports that were generated through a systematic approach supported by the use of various kinds of technology and social media.

The above example has been highlighted to reiterate the fact that election observation is a continuous process and it can only produce meaningful results if it is allowed to go on uninterrupted. Similarly, in the case of Malaysia where there is a definitive need for more training to sharpen the skills of the observers, it goes without saying that a few more training sessions will strengthen the efforts that are underway to monitor the elections.

Soon after the recent Malaysia training, at least 10 mostly experienced participants expressed the need to hold at least another training to try to help understand if the present approach to observe the elections will be useful or if some changes need to be incorporated. Most of the participants admitted that they were busy with their plans, but they also acknowledged that they were not well trained to observe the elections.

A particular suggestion that was made, and which can be evaluated before considering another training, is that trainers need to be put through a **Teach-Back** mechanism in the training to better understand what they have learned and whether they are ready to impart training to other observers. This could certainly be a useful way of evaluating the trainers and provide them the opportunity to develop even as other activities (local training, ToT, etc) are simultaneously organised. Training will only help to complement the process of developing the domestic election observation methodologies, which will be used by the domestic observers during the elections. All issues that are important

can be addressed individually and the best methods and a workable module can be developed which will provide legitimacy to any election observation that is planned and implemented on the ground by the Permantau.

**Evaluation of the Training held in Kuala Lumpur between
January 21 to January 23, 2013**

Most participants described the training as “very useful” and were of the opinion that it was extremely relevant to their needs. Notably, most participants said that they learned about “How to observe elections on Election Day, methods of reporting (the Fast Track and Slow Track approaches) and information sharing, observing campaigns and documenting the use of resources by political parties, documenting violations, as well as understanding the legalities and pursuing cases of campaign finance violations.” Most of the participants also said that afterward they had a better understanding of the different aspects of the electoral cycle. What is of significance is the fact most participants said that they were not familiar with the reporting forms and checklists and felt that the session on preparation of these documents was extremely useful. Some even suggested the need for more training so as to achieve a high level of accuracy and perfection.

To specific questions regarding what they learned which they did not know before the training, different participants had different responses. However a common response was that before the training most of the attendees did not have enough knowhow on the “Systems and processes for an effective election observation.” Some others, in particular from Sabah, made a categorical reference to the session on “Strategy Building, Information Collection and Reporting (Fast and Slow Track methodologies),” whereas others referred to the session on “media monitoring” as an important lesson that they were not aware of. Others were of the opinion that the challenges, tasks and organizational skills needed by an observer were new areas to learn about.

On the question of familiarity with any aspect of the electoral processes which was taken up during the training, most participants referred to the introductory session on the “Electoral Cycle” while many others said not much was familiar as “things keep changing” all the time.

When questioned about how the training has assisted them and the most important thing that they learned, the responses varied, with some saying that the training gave them a sense and a clearer picture of what is involved in election observation, both short and long term observation, ways to build up management and human relation skills and, most importantly, how to strengthen self-confidence as domestic election observers. Some others were of the opinion that it gave them hope that changes in

Malaysia would happen gradually and that international pressure will be created to eventually realize these changes.

Asked what they regarded as the most important lesson, most participants mentioned about observing the election process at the polling station, besides building teamwork, educating the public following a systematized documentation and reporting process, applying creative skills to get things done and how to overcome the challenges encountered in the field as an observer. An interesting reference was made by one participant regarding the need for Contingency Plans that were discussed as a learning tool that can be applied when situations change or the unexpected happens.

On how the participants would use the knowledge and the methodologies that were discussed during the training, a common response was that different groups would incorporate newer ideas and approaches from the training into their own training sessions for observers who would be deployed in different parts of the country to monitor the 13th General Elections in Malaysia. One of the participants from Sabah made particular reference to the use of the various modules like, Group Work (Cooperative learning); Case Studies; Role Playing; Games; Supporting Notes-Hang outs; Scenarios and Simulations as very useful for the training that he intends to take up in his constituency to develop a comprehensive approach to monitor the ensuing elections.

On ways to improve the training and things that could be included in the future, there were suggestions for a separate session on “real life testimonials” possibly with a domestic observer, more time on election day observation, more time so that every aspect of the electoral process can be covered and contextualized. The suggestions for improving the training content ranged from “more/adequate time,” to allow domestic observers to learn more, experience sharing from other countries, and requests for audio-visual content from past ANFREL EOMs, etc.

Most participants said that the overall content, relevance, variety of resources and new content areas were excellent. They said that the length of the course was good and hoped more time is allotted the next time. On facilitation, such as professionalism, knowledge, flexibility and training skills, the trainees were generous to mark it all as excellent.

On their own participation in particular on improved knowledge, improved skills, new perspectives, sharing experiences and working with colleagues the response was both excellent and good. Most of the trainees were happy with the selection of the venue and the distribution of sessions and break-times.

To another set of evaluation and feedback questions specifically focused on rating their impressions about the training, the group work and activities, games, the subjects that were discussed and the translations, more than 90 percent of the participants said that they were satisfied and found the training extremely valuable.

The need for further training was separately discussed during brief exit meetings and via follow-up emails and the common response was that a little more training would help to improve the skills of the new observers and volunteers who would be deployed on the ground. While some groups expressed their willingness to participate in a more training before the elections, they wanted to discuss the plans with their local partners in different constituencies for maximum impact.

Facilitators Remarks:

Ms. Pipit Apriani, Co-Facilitator, KIPP Indonesia

Based on her interaction with leaders of some organizations, Pipit says the people she met are not sure if Bersih can have 10,000 observers as they planned. According to her, Maffrel has about 300 members across the country, and only small numbers are active. She says that Bersih perhaps can have 3,000 - 5,000 members. She was given the impression that the observers will be unskilled, which could cause problems on the ground.

Her suggestions to the Local Monitoring groups:

1. Contact and call the members in the database to be active again in Maffrel
2. Make formal and informal meetings for them
3. Have a special Facebook account regarding the election PRU 13 in order to be close and to get in touch with first time and/or young voters
4. Conduct more training for observers in order to avoid and prevent problems caused by unskilled observers.
5. Call more people to join a kind of soft campaign, e.g., just to wear the T-shirt of Bersih, to make people aware of the need for free and fair elections, if Bersih or Maffrel can't have as many observers as they planned.

Some more observations:

Pipit believes that the problems lie with Bersih itself. Reasons:

1. They didn't provide enough information to observers before training.
2. The Bersih coalition sent inexperienced and experienced participants to the same training. Age doesn't matter.
3. Some participants attended 3 days, some only 2 days, some 1 day, and some only several hours.
4. They didn't want to mention their current number of observers and their structure, too. So, Pipit is having to estimate what they already have, etc.

Pipit believes that Bersih didn't give enough information about them or, ANFREL didn't ask about this. This is just her assumption. She attended the recruitment program in Kuantan where she found that the coalition is already ready with the modules. What they need to do is just take action, or like Nike "Do It!" They are less confident in

themselves. And don't forget, their numbers of observers is smaller than they stated, which is the reason they didn't want to mention the number.

There is a need for more training as most of the observers are inexperienced and they may not be able to perform as the job requires, even if they are informed about the observation modules and methodologies. This belief is based on experiences in Indonesia where it was found that mere mobilization of observers is not enough and that it needs to be backed by sound knowledge and training on the mechanics of election observation.

However, one portion of the training that was left largely uncovered is the need to train eyes on how media play a role in shaping the entire election campaign observation. This chapter was not fully introduced. There were two reasons for this. The first reason was the non-media activists participating among the group of 25 people in the three-day training. The other was the limited amount of time, which prevented further elaboration on how monitoring media can enhance observation work and engaging media inputs into observation work from the outset.

In the future, the segment on media should be given a sufficient role in the training to allow observers to enhance their own skills on picking up tangible and relevant content in the media (both online as well as print) in order to make observation more thorough, rather than leaving one particular group (for example CIJ) to have sole responsibility. Based on experience, the most intense period of media observation would be during the last few days of the campaign period and on Election Day itself, where many issues need to be reported with a high degree of accuracy and in a timely manner in order to give weight to the findings.

Mr. Bidhayak Das, Coordinator, ANFREL-Foundation

It is encouraging to note that the Permantau are trying their level best to put together what possibly will be an election observation mission (EOM). Even if it is not an EOM per se, the fact that there are concerted efforts to monitor the electoral process is in itself commendable. At this point in time, more training is advisable; however, there are a number of things that need to be taken into consideration. What also needs to be considered is that the Permantau led by Bersih 2.0 does not have sufficient time to organize too many training sessions for trainers and whatever local training is happening currently perhaps should continue uninterrupted. If, on top of that, additional inputs are needed, which may be termed as a revision or refresher as has been mentioned by some friends and colleagues, they should be considered.

The local training programs that are under way need to be monitored closely, which ANFREL local contacts are doing, to ensure that things are on track and any future attempt at mass mobilization or demonstrations against an allegedly fraudulent

electoral process is backed by facts recorded in a strong and comprehensive EOM report. To this effect, ANFREL is willing to lend support in any way possible to aid in preparing for a thorough, accurate election monitoring program. As of now, based on the evaluation and assessment from participants, fellow trainers and others who were part of the planning process of the training, we can assume that a review should be done between ANFREL and the donors and a quick decision taken on whether a second training session is necessary.

For further inquiries

Please contact:

1. Bidhayak Das
Coordinator, ANFREL-Foundation
Email: bidhayak.d@gmail.com

or

2. Ichal Supriadi
Executive Director
ANFREL-Foundation
Email: satoeichal@gmail.com