

PROJECT 2011 SWIFTCOUNT



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Interim Statement on the Presidential Elections Sunday April 17, 2011

Delivered at the Sheraton Hotel, Abuja

Summary

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, on behalf of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of Project 2011 Swift Count, it is our pleasure to welcome you to this press conference to report on our initial observations concerning yesterday's presidential election.

As you already know, Project 2011 Swift Count is jointly carried out by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Justice Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). Thus reflecting the rich diversity of Nigeria, it brings together Christians and Muslims, as well as organizations with citizen election observation and legal expertise.

For the presidential election, Project 2011 Swift Count deployed more than 8,000 accredited observers to all 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) – over 7,000 stationary observers at polling units and nearly 1,000 mobile observers.

Based on observer reports from a final representative random sample of 1,468 polling units in 767 of the 774 LGAs, Project 2011 Swift Count finds that across the country citizens were generally provided with a meaningful opportunity to exercise their right to vote and that the process improved over the National Assembly elections held last week. These elections were not without problems – in particular, isolated incidents of intimidation, violence, and illegal voting. But these incidents did not undermine the overall credibility of the process.

We are, however, extremely concerned about accredited observers being denied access to polling units. In several states, Project 2011 Swift Count observers were harassed and in some cases detained by security forces. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the security forces must take all necessary steps to ensure accredited observers have free access to polling units and collation centres.

Violence, unfortunately, has not been eliminated from our elections. There was another bombing in Maiduguri on election day. The partner organisations continue to condemn all violence in the strongest possible terms and call upon all Nigerians to help ensure peaceful elections in our country.

Our findings today are only about the processes of accreditation of voters, voting and counting at polling units. Project 2011 Swift Count continues to observe the collation process and to collect and analyse individual polling station results in order to verify the official results to be announced by INEC. We will issue additional statements as appropriate.

Methodology

The primary objective of Project 2011 Swift Count is to help promote free, fair, peaceful, credible and legitimate elections in Nigeria that are conducted in accordance with international and regional standards as well as the laws and the constitution of our country and the “*Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organisations*”.

The Swift Count methodology provides voters, political contestants and electoral authorities with an accurate, real-time picture of the conduct of the accreditation of voters, voting and counting. This serves as a deterrent to anyone tempted to manipulate the process. Project 2011 Swift Count will also be able to provide voters and political contestants greater confidence that the official results accurately reflect the ballots cast.

Swift Count uses samples of polling units for each election that have been carefully selected by trained Nigerian statisticians, using time-tested statistical principles to ensure that they are both representative and unbiased. This methodology, when matched with the latest technology—text messages transmitted by cell phones to a central data base—enables Project 2011 Swift Count to present an objective, nonpartisan, real-time picture of the conduct of the election and to verify the accuracy of the official results.

Findings

Access to Polling Units

For the presidential election, accredited observers faced significantly more challenges gaining access to polling units. First, there appears to be a mistaken belief on the part of some security personnel that only international observers are permitted to be mobile. As a result some of our mobile observers have been stopped and required to observe at only one polling unit. For example, this occurred in Taraba and resulted in a mobile observer having his motorcycle confiscated until after the election. In addition, in a number of states, including Borno, Kaduna, Oyo, Plateau and Taraba, observers reported that security personnel, local government chairmen, INEC officials, party agents and/or members of the community denied them access to polling units.

Finally, and of utmost concern, across Warri North and Warri South West, LGAs in Delta state, Project 2011 Swift Count observers were denied access to the area by the community and unable to observe any part of the process. Several of our observers there were detained throughout the night by the security agencies without just cause. This action is unacceptable. INEC, the security agencies and all others involved should as a matter of urgency do everything in their power to address this situation and prevent any similar occurrence in the future.

Opening of Polling Units

Our findings suggest an improvement in INEC’s logistics compared to the National Assembly elections. As of 7:30 am, observers at 42% of polling units reported that officials were present and ready for the presidential elections. This is an improvement over the 13% of polling units that were ready at the same time on Saturday April 2nd and 28% on Saturday April 9th. Logistical problems were more significant in the South East and South South geo-political zones where only 29% of polling units were ready by 7:30 am.

Accreditation of Voters

Accreditation of voters generally went smoothly. However, there were polling units where, contrary to INEC procedures, voters were accredited and voted at the same time. In addition, at more than a third of polling units the majority of voters did not remain at the polling unit after being accredited. Both of these issues could undermine the safeguards put in place by INEC to prevent multiple voting.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that accreditation of voters started at 76% of polling units by 9:00 am. This is compared to only 58% opening by 9:00 am for the National Assembly election. Late opening of polling units was a particular problem in South East and South South, where 51% and 42% respectively of polling units opened after 9:00 am.
- 34% of our observers reported that more than half of the accredited voters left the polling unit after being accredited. This is a higher percentage than was observed during the National Assembly election when 28% of our observers reported more than half of accredited voters leaving the polling unit.

Our other findings concerning the accreditation of voters are consistent with those from the National Assembly elections.

- On average, our observers reported 3 polling officials and 3 political party agents present at polling units.
- 93% of our observers reported that there were security personnel at the polling unit.
- 7% of our observers reported people being accredited to vote who did not have a voter's card.
- 95% of our observers reported that voters' names were ticked in the register of voters when being accredited.
- 92% of our observers reported that voters' cuticles were marked when being accredited.
- 6% of our observers reported incidents of harassment or intimidation at polling units, but these were isolated across the country.

Voting

Generally, voting was conducted without serious problems. However, as noted above, voting at some polling units occurred at the same time as accreditation of voters, rather than after. In addition, observers witnessed people being accredited to vote after accreditation had closed.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that voting began by 1:00 pm at 80% of polling units. This is an improvement over the National Assembly election when 58% of observers reported that voting had commenced by 1:00 pm.
- 15% of our observers reported that people were accredited to vote after accreditation had closed. This is slightly higher than the 11% reported for the National Assembly election. This issue was of greatest concern in South South, where 26% of observer reported people being accredited to vote after accreditation closed.

Other findings related to the voting process are consistent with those from the National Assembly elections.

- 94% of our observers reported that no one was permitted to vote without a voter's card.
- 99% of our observers reported that every ballot paper was stamped and signed before being given to voters.
- 8% of our observers reported incidents of harassment or intimidation during the voting process. These were isolated incidents.

Counting

Few problems were reported with the counting process. In fact, there was a marked improvement in the posting of official results by polling officials, compared to the National Assembly elections.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that the ballot papers were properly sorted and counted at 99% of polling units.
- At 96% of polling units our observers reported that all political party agents present agreed with the results as announced by the polling officials.
- Only 7% of our observers reported that polling officials did not post the official results at the polling unit as required by INEC. This is an improvement over the National Assembly elections where results were not posted at 20% of polling units.
- 5% of our observers reported incidents of harassment or intimidation during the counting process. These were isolated incidents.

Critical Incidents

A total of 628 critical incident reports were received from the nearly 1,000 mobile observers deployed by Project 2011 Swift Count in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These critical incidents were relatively evenly distributed but with a greater number and more serious incidents occurring in the South South. While these incidents are serious and must be addressed they do not fundamentally undermine the integrity of the overall process.

- The most frequently reported incidents were: intimidation and harassment; improper accreditation of voters; campaigning or campaign materials in or around polling units; violence; and vote buying.
- Compared to the National Assembly elections, there were fewer incidents of late arrival of materials, suspension of voting and stealing of ballot boxes.
- However, there were more incidents reported of observers not being allowed access to polling units or to observe the process.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Project 2011 Swift Count makes the following recommendation.

- The four partner organizations call for the immediate and unconditional release of all observers detained in Delta state.

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- INEC should ensure that all accredited observers, not just internationals, are able to move freely and to access polling units and collation centres across the country.
- INEC should ensure that anyone engaged in any act of electoral malfeasance be brought to justice swiftly.
- Political parties should publicly condemn any act of intimidation, vote buying, underage voting or any other electoral malpractice by any of their members or supporters.
- The security agencies should heed the calls by Prof. Attahiru Jega to bring to book all those individuals engaged in electoral offenses, particularly underage voting.
- The security agencies should refrain from any action that prevents accredited observers from carrying out their mandate.

The Presidential election is not yet concluded. Results are still being collated and INEC has yet to announce the official results. Project 2011 Swift Count calls upon all Nigerians to remain calm during this period. We will continue to observe the process and will provide independent verification of the official results as announced by INEC.

On April 26, Nigerians will go to the polls again to elect Governors and Members of their State Houses of Assembly. Even though the conduct of the National Assembly elections and the presidential election give us reason for optimism, the conduct of the State elections is not guaranteed. All Nigerians must redouble their efforts to ensure that the State elections are consistent with international and regional standards as well as the constitution and laws of Nigeria. In particular, these elections pose greater logistical challenges and INEC must continue to take steps to improve its performance.

For the State elections, Project 2011 Swift Count will again deploy more than 7,000 stationary observers at polling units in every state and every LGA of the country and nearly 1,000 mobile observers. We will conduct pilot gubernatorial Swift Counts in six states: Plateau (NC), Borno (NE), Kano (NW), Imo (SE), Delta (SS) and Oyo (SW). One state was selected per geo-political zone based on a number of factors including degree of contestation and concerns over possible post-election violence. This will enable Project 2011 Swift Count to provide real-time, systematic information on the conduct of these elections and to verify the accuracy of official result for select gubernatorial elections announced by INEC.

Project 2011 Swift Count again recognizes the dedication of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members who are serving as polling officials despite the many challenges. We also commend Nigerians on your determination to exercise your right to vote. We urge all registered Nigerians to again go out and vote on April 26 for the State elections.

God Bless Nigeria



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