

# PROJECT SWIFT COUNT



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## Statement on the Bayelsa Gubernatorial Election Held Saturday, 11 February 2012

### Delivered at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja

### Summary

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, on behalf of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of Project Swift Count, it is our pleasure to welcome you to this press conference to report on our observation finding for the February 11, 2012, Bayelsa gubernatorial election.

As you already know, Project 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 Bayelsa gubernatorial election, Project Swift Count deployed 573 observers to all 8 Local Government Areas (LGAs) – 550 stationary observers at polling units and 23 mobile observers. While PSC received high rates of response from the deployed observers in 7 of the 8 LGAs, observers deployed to the Southern Ijaw LGA were only able to

reports from 75.95% of open polling units, a significant departure from the reporting rates of over 90% from the other LGAs. While the confidence level for the Southern Ijaw LGA is lower, it only nominally affects the overall level of confidence in the Swift Count estimate because of the large margin of victory by the winning party.

Our findings today address the processes of accreditation of voters, the voting and counting at polling units, and the verification of the Bayelsa gubernatorial election results as announced by INEC.

Based on observer reports from a final representative random sample of 275 polling units in the 8 LGAs, Project Swift Count finds that although it does not substantially undermine confidence that the announced winning candidate in fact received the most votes, the suspiciously high rates of voter turnout reported across the eight LGAs do create concern about the credibility of the electoral process.

Using the number of registered voters announced by electoral officials at the polling units and the total votes cast at the observed polling units, PSC estimates that the average voter turnout across the State was reported to be 71.4%. The Sagbama, Brass, and Nembe LGAs reported 90 to 100% voter turnout rates at 53%, 48%, and 42% of their total polling units, respectively. The remaining LGAs reported 90 to 100% voter turnout rates at between 9% (Yenagoa) and 31% of their total polling units. Anecdotal reports from observers from Swift Count and other CSOs suggest that the actual rate of voter turnout was substantially lower than these reported figures.

While this is a serious issue and steps need to be taken to address it before Sokoto and Cross River, it does not call into question the outcome of the election, as it appears the candidate declared the winner by INEC was, in fact, the preferred candidate of choice of the people.

## **Methodology**

The primary objective of Project 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 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 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**

### Accreditation and Access to Polling Units

There were some serious concerns related to the Opening and Accreditation process:

- PSC observers reported that 8% of the polling units never opened throughout Election Day. These polling units were located primarily in the Ekeremor and Sagbama LGAs.
- In 33.8% of polling units, polling officials arrived by 7:30 am.
- Only 41.1% of polling units had started accreditation by 9 a.m.
- At 25% of the polling units, more than half of the persons were allowed to leave the polling unit after accreditation, with the

highest rates in Yenagoa, Kolokuma-Opokuma, and Sagbama LGAs.

- A few people with voter's card were refused accreditation because their names were missing in the voter's register at 21% of the polling units.
- Observers reported that in 9.5% of polling units voters/polling officials were harassed or intimidated during accreditation.
- There was an average of 2 polling officials present in the polling units.
- There was an average of 3 political party agents present at the polling units.
- Security personnel were present in 90% of polling units .

### Voting Process

Although voting went on smoothly in some polling units, there were some problems of harassment and intimidation of voters or polling officials in some LGAs, namely Southern Ijaw, Yenagoa, Sagbama and Ekeremor.

- Voting began by 1 pm in 74.3% of polling stations.
- A few voters were permitted to vote without a voter's card at 10.3% of the polling units.
- Voters were accredited to vote after the accreditation process was closed at 8.4% of polling stations. This was most pronounced in Yenagoa and Sagbama LGAs.
- Voters were not able to mark their ballots in secret at 6.4% of polling units.
- Incidents of harassment and intimidation during the voting process occurred at 4.2% of the polling units.
- Consistent with the presidential, Kogi, and Adamawa elections, our observers reported at 98% of the polling units that every ballot paper was stamped and signed before being given to voters.

### Counting Process

Generally, ballot counting was conducted without many problems:

- Ballot papers were properly sorted and counted at 96.2% of polling units.
- At 93.6% of polling units all political party agents present agreed with the results as announced by the polling officials.
- At 7.2% of the polling units that polling officials did not post the official results at the polling unit as required by INEC.
- The announced results did not match the posted results at 6.4% of the polling stations.
- Incidents of harassment or intimidation occurred during the counting process at 6.4% of the polling units.

### Verification of Official INEC Results

Using a random representative sample that included reports from 275 polling units, the results estimated by Project Swift Count are consistent with the results announced by INEC. Our observers collected results as they are announced and posted at the polling unit.

Table 1: Swift Count Bayelsa Gubernatorial Election\*

<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>PSC Estimates %</b>	<b>Margin of Error (95% level of confidence)</b>	<b>PSC Range in %</b>	<b>INEC Announced Results %</b>
ACN	2.2	0.46	1.74 – 2.66	2.1
CAP	5.6	1.62	3.98 – 7.22	4.9
CPC	0.6	0.24	0.36 – 0.84	0.8
PDP	89.7	1.82	87.88 – 91.52	90.8
Remainder of 32 Parties Combined	1.7	1.81	0.0 – 3.5	1.4

\* Results as posted by INEC on its website on February 13, 2012.

The order and magnitude of the INEC results for each of these parties is the same as the Swift Count estimates.

## **Voter Turnout**

There is significant concern about the voter turnout figure for Bayelsa State. Overall, PSC estimated the turnout for Bayelsa at 71.4% as compared to 37.5% for Adamawa and 35.1% for Kogi. For the general election there was concern about the high turnout rate across South-South and South-East, and for those elections, Bayelsa's turnout rate was 91%.

This unusually high voter turnout may have resulted from a number of factors, including: inaccurate voter registers, inaccurate voting data reported at polling units, or voters not being required to remain at their polling unit after accreditation and being accredited to vote after the accreditation process had closed—which opens the possibility of multiple voting. Because the highest levels of voter turnout generally occurred in LGAs with lower levels of irregularities in the accreditation process, multiple voting does not likely account fully for the exceptionally high reported rates of voter turnout.

These turnout figures do not call into question the outcome of the election as announced by INEC.

## **Critical Incidents**

A total of 63 critical incident reports were received from all mobile and stationary observers deployed by Project Swift Count in Bayelsa state. These incidents are considered serious and could undermine the integrity of the overall process.

The most serious of the critical incidents reported include:

- Voting Suspended— Southern Ijaw; Yenagoa; Brass
- No Elections/Non-Existence of Polling Units— Ogbia, Southern Ijaw, Yenagoa

- Ballot Box Snatching/Stuffing—Yenagoa, Nembe, Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor
- Simultaneous Accreditation and Voting—Nembe, Southern Ijaw, Yenagoa, Ekeremor
- Vote Buying/Bribery— Southern Ijaw; Yenagoa; Ekeremor; Nembe

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

- INEC has significantly improved its observer accreditation process and it should continue this positive trend.
- Logistics challenges continue to plague INEC. The minimal percentage of 42% polling units opening on time that it attained during the April 2011 general elections has been on the decline. In the Bayelsa election, it was 33.8% which is a decline when compared to Adamawa's 38%. The coming Sokoto and Cross River governorship elections present an opportunity for the commission to show improvement.
- Voter turnout was estimated at approximately 71.4%; however, the actual figure was almost certainly substantially lower. Observation and anecdotal reports suggest that voter apathy in Bayelsa was even higher than in the Kogi and Adamawa elections. Such voter apathy remains an impediment to deepening the democratic process in Nigeria.
- Intimidation and harassment of voters, observers, and polling officials continues to occur. More effort needs to be made by governments, INEC, and civil society to educate communities on the importance of credible elections, and the necessity of citizen observation.
- The security personnel deployed to the polling units have been demonstrating their ability to contribute positively to the democratic process, and their capacity to contain electoral mishaps is recommended. Security agencies and forces should continue to support their personnel with additional training and education in advance of future electoral exercises.

- Secrecy of the ballot was a challenge during the Bayelsa election, violating a fundamental dimension of democratic elections. INEC should continue to review the processes in place to allow voters to cast ballots with their choice free from scrutiny. INEC should provide cubicles for voter to exercise their franchise to achieve the desired secrecy.
- There is an urgent need for political parties and contestants to show maturity and respect for the voting process so as to forestall nefarious practices such as ballot box snatching, vote buying, bribing of security agencies and sponsoring of political thugs.
- The large number of critical incidents that occurred during the Bayelsa gubernatorial election creates great concern; however, it does not appear that the outcome of the election was altered by these incidents.

God Bless Nigeria



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