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Statement on the Kebbi Gubernatorial Election – Held 31 March 2012

Delivered at Valencia Hotel, Abuja on 2 April 2012

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 findings for the March 31, 2012, Kebbi 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 Kebbi gubernatorial election, Project Swift Count deployed 627 observers across all 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) — 600 stationary observers at 300 polling units and 27 mobile observers.

The polling units to which stationary observers were deployed were carefully selected as a random, representative sample of all 2,398 polling units

across Kebbi; therefore, PSC is able to conclude, with 95% certainty, that its qualitative observations about the electoral process and its quantitative estimates of the election results reflect the process and results from all 2,398 polling units in Kebbi, not merely at the polling units observed.

Our findings today address the processes of accreditation of voters, the voting and counting at polling units, and the verification of the Kebbi gubernatorial election results as announced by the Independent National Election Commission (INEC).

Project Swift Count finds generally that the process provided most of the people of Kebbi with a meaningful opportunity to exercise their right to vote and that the official results as announced by INEC accurately reflect the ballots cast at polling units; however, the unusually high estimated voter turnout coupled with a significant number of polling units that failed to mark the fingers of all voters upon voting casts significant doubt on this credibility of this estimated rate of voter turnout. We will address the possible causes for this issue later in the statement.

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 also provides

voters and political contestants greater confidence that the official results accurately reflect the ballots cast.

Project 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.

As PSC has noted previously, INEC did not make available to PSC the voter register for individual polling units for Bayelsa, Sokoto, or Cross River, nor has it done so for Kebbi. Instead, PSC can only obtain the number of persons registered to vote at the polling units as it is announced by the electoral officers at each polling unit. Because the percentage of voter turnout is calculated by dividing the number of voters casting ballots at a polling unit by the total number of persons eligible to vote at that polling unit, PSC cannot reliably and independently verify the voter turnout percentage without having access to the official voter registers for the polling units. PSC renews its call to INEC to release the voter register lists for individual polling units to improve transparency in the electoral process.

Findings

Opening of Polling Units

INEC continues to suffer logistical challenges, as evidenced by the delayed deployment of polling officials and election materials to some polling units.

- As of 7:30 am, at only 53% of the polling units across Kebbi had polling officials and election materials arrived at the polling unit; however, this is a notable improvement

from Cross River (19%), Bayelsa (32%), and Sokoto (43%).

- Virtually every polling unit opened in Kebbi. Sokoto also reported all polling units opened, while some polling units failing altogether to open in Cross River (3%) and Bayelsa (9%).

Accreditation of Voters

- Accreditation of voters had started by 9:00 a.m. at 65% of polling units by 9:00 am, with 99% by noon. This is similar to Sokoto (73%) and better than Cross River (35%) and Bayelsa (32%).
- Across all polling units, there were on average 2.5 polling officials and 2 political party polling agents present at polling units.
- There were security personnel at 94% of the polling units.
- At 83% of polling units, no one was accredited to vote who did not have a voter's card, while at an additional 15% of polling units, only a few people were accredited who did not have voter's card.
- At 95% of polling units, none or only a few voters were turned away because their name was not found on the register of voters.
- All or most voters' names were ticked in the register of voters at 93% of all polling units, and all or most voters had their cuticles marked with indelible ink at 98% of polling units.

Of concern during accreditation of voters:

- Everyone or nearly everyone remained at their assigned polling unit after being accredited at 75% of polling units; however, at 20% of the polling units, most people left their assigned polling unit after being accredited. This problem was most acute in Augie, Suru, Arewa, Bunza, Birnin-Kebbi, and Dandi LGAs.

- There were incidents of harassment or intimidation at 4% of polling units during the accreditation process—with this problem most significant in Arewa, Wasagu-Danko, Ngaski, Zuru, and Birnin-Kebbi LGAs.

Voting

- Voting had commenced by 2:00 pm at 97% of polling units.
- At 11% of polling units, new voters were accredited once voting had commenced. This is compared with Cross River (19%), Sokoto (10%), and Baylesa (16%).
- At 99% of polling units, the ballot box was shown to be empty before being closed and locked.
- At 86% of polling units, voters were able to mark their ballots in secret.
- All or almost all voters showed voters cards and had indelible ink on the cuticle of a left finger when voting at 98% of polling units;
- At 98% of polling units, all ballot papers were stamped and signed;
- All voters' cuticles on a right finger were marked with indelible ink at 86% of polling units. This is comparable to the rates in Cross River (94%), Sokoto (89%), Bayelsa (90%), Adamawa (90%), and Kogi (88%).
- All voters' names were checked in the register of voters at 89% of polling units.

Of concern during voting:

- Incidents of harassment or intimidation during the voting process occurred at 4% of the polling units, though Dandi LGA reported harassment or intimidation at 18% of polling units

Counting

- Ballot papers were properly sorted and counted at 95% of polling units.
- At 96% of polling units, the official results were publicly posted, and these posted results matched the announced results at 96% of the polling units.

Of concern during counting:

- At 5% of polling units, some political party agents present disagreed with the results as announced by the polling officials. This issue was most problematic in Zuru (18%), Maiyama (13%), Yauri (9%), and Fakai (8%) LGAs. While this is of concern, it did not substantially affect the outcome of the election, given the large margin of victory in the election.
- Acts of intimidation during the counting process occurred at 3% of the polling units, with the problem most severe in Augie (14%), Jega (14%), Koko-Besse (13%), Ngaski (9%), and Shanga (8%) LGAs.

Turnout and Rejected Ballots

The estimated turnout for the Kebbi Gubernatorial election is 51.8%, with a margin of error of 3.4%. Turnout for Kebbi was significantly higher than for Cross River (37%), Sokoto (29.9%), Adamawa (37.5%) and Kogi (35.1%). Turnout for Kebbi was lower than for Bayelsa (71.4%), but PSC found the Bayelsa turnout not a credible figure.

Rejected ballots (meaning those for which the voter's intent could not be clearly determined and hence were not counted) were estimated at 2.3%, which led to thousands of ballots not being counted.

Verification of Official Results

Using a random, representative sample that included reports from 300 polling units, the results estimated by Project Swift Count are consistent with the results announced by INEC. Our observers collected official results as they were announced and posted at the polling unit by INEC.

Table 1: Project Swift Count Cross River Gubernatorial Election*				
Political Party	PSC Estimates (%)	Margin of Error (at 95% level of confidence)	PSC Estimated Range (%)	INEC Announced Results (%)
CPC	2.0%	0.2%	1.8% – 2.2%	2.0%
PDP	93.6%	0.4%	93.2% – 94%	93.4%
Remaining 13 parties	2.1%	0.1%	2.0% – 2.2%	1.9%
Rejected Ballots	2.3%	0.3%	2.0% - 2.6%	2.7%

*Results as announced on NTA by INEC on April 1, 2012.

The order and magnitude of the INEC results for each of these parties is the same as the Swift Count estimates. Because Project Swift Count was able to independently collect official results from polling units and arrive at the same results as INEC, political contestants and the public alike should have a high degree of confidence that the official results as announced by INEC reflect the votes cast in the Kebbi gubernatorial election.

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are electoral irregularities, whether intentional or inadvertent, that could undermine the integrity of the overall process if they were to occur at significant levels and rates. For

the 627 observers, only 37 critical incident reports were received.

The most frequently reported incidents were:

- vote buying
- simultaneous voting and accreditation
- accreditation of voters after voting has commenced
- illegal voting

The less frequently reported incidents included:

- late arrival of election materials;
- partisan polling officials;
- partisan security personnel
- shortage of election materials
- campaigning and campaign materials in or near polling units
- intimidation or harassment
- stealing of ballot papers
- violence
- ballot box stuffing

While these incidents are serious and must be addressed by INEC, they did not occur at levels and rates that would substantially undermine the integrity of the overall electoral process or the results of the Kebbi gubernatorial election held 31 March 2012, due to the significantly large margin between the contestants.

Recommendations

- Voter turnout was estimated at 51.8%; however, this is not a credible figure. INEC should ensure proper electoral procedures are followed to preclude the possibility of multiple voting and also should ensure the voters register accurately reflects the number of voters registered for each polling unit to ensure accurate turnout figures

- The election data provided by INEC officials were logically inconsistent in a significant number of polling units. This reveals a need for better training of electoral officials to ensure competent administration of elections.
- People leaving the polling unit after they have been accredited remains a significant problem. In Kebbi, 75% of the polling units reported none or only a few people left after being accredited; however, at 25% of the polling units, more than half of the people left after accreditation. Allowing people to leave the polling unit after accreditation opens the possibility of multiple voting, and INEC should address this concern for the upcoming elections in Edo States.
- In recent elections, the numbers of accredited voters announced by INEC officials at the polling units at the conclusion of the counting process were greater than the numbers of voters who had accredited by the end of the accreditation process. In Kebbi, each polling unit had, on average, eight more voters after counting than at the close of accreditation. In Cross River, the difference was 13, in Bayelsa, six, and in Sokoto 15. The cause of this discrepancy needs to be identified and resolved prior to the Edo election.
- Secrecy of the ballot continues to be a challenge, violating a fundamental dimension of democratic elections. In Kebbi, 14% of polling units failed to provide secrecy of the ballot for voters. The failure to ensure secrecy of the ballot may contribute to the anecdotally reported incidences of vote buying in Kebbi. INEC should continue to review the processes in place to allow voters to cast ballots with their choice free from scrutiny. INEC should provide adequate cubicles for voter to achieve the required secrecy.

Project Swift Count plans to continue to observe the electoral process and deploy observers for upcoming Gubernatorial Elections in Edo State.

God Bless Nigeria



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Learn more about Project Swift Count at www.pscnigeria.org