



CENTRE LSD INTERIM REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION HELD FEBRUARY 23, 2019.

Preamble

The first round of contest in the Nigerian 2019 election was held nationwide on February 23, 2019. The Presidential and National Assembly election suffered one-week postponement penultimate weekend to logistics concerns as cited by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body responsible for the conduct of the exercise. Prior to the election, the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD) was accredited by the election management body as one organization that should observe the election. Accordingly, the Centre deployed a total of 419 observers across the nation to observe the election. The observation done in conjunction with the Priest Peace and Justice Initiative, the development arm of the Palace of Priest Assembly (PPA), a Pentecostal church based in Abuja, recorded several impressions about the observation as captured below;

a) INEC logistics and arrival of materials: In most places observed, INEC Ad-hoc officials and materials did not arrive as at when due. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had before the election date stated that voting will commence in all the polling locations and voting points at 8.00am. Surprisingly, this was not adhered to. At Emonu-Orogun in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, materials did not arrive polling units 013, 014, 015 and 016 until 10.00am. The same late arrival of materials were reported at DSC Township School, in Udu Local Government Area of Delta state. At polling unit 011 both the INEC and security staff arrived at 11.30 am. At 2.27 voting was still taking place. At PU 005, Mgbahiri Ward in Owerri North Local Government, Imo state, the situation was the same. At Maikunkele Ward, 08 Area Court in Suleja Local Government Area of Niger state, materials arrived late at polling unit 011 and voting started about two hours late. The challenging logistics arrangement affected the set up and commencement of the accreditation and voting exercises. In most of the places, the time had to be extended to be able to attend fully to the electorates.

b) Accreditation and voting: Accreditation and voting were done simultaneously, and it started immediately after the set up at about 10.30am. the accreditation process was slow, and it took close to 5 minutes to attend to each voter on the queue. The slow pace was occasioned by the response rate of the card reader. Though names of the voters were pasted at conspicuous places within the precinct of the polling units for people to check their names and their numbers in the nominal roll to at least hasten the accreditation process, this also did not change the speed as the finger certification by the card reader, took some time. The voting process however was smooth. Preferences were given to the aged to vote first but provisions were not made to physically challenged persons.

c) Turnout of voters: The turnout of voters to the polling units were impressive. At polling units 013 and 014, whereas the number of registered voters were 685 and 656 respectively, the total number of accredited voters were 600 and 500 respectively, representing between 76.22 and 87.59 percent voter turnout. The voters' turnout in the 11 states including the FCT where the Centre observed was impressive. There was however, reports of underage voters among the throng of voters at PU 011 in Nyanya, Angwan Huasawa, FCT.

d) Secrecy of the ballot: Whereas INEC made provision for the secrecy of the voting process by providing voting cubicles, the party agents did not help the process. They were willingly guiding and aiding the aged and the uneducated on how to thumb print. The reason was to avoid void and invalid votes. No case of vote buying was seen within the voting environment. Although water and soft drinks were bought by some party representatives to refresh those within the voting arena, perhaps to cushion the intense heat from the sun.

e) Security of the election: The voting exercise was generally very peaceful. In each of the units, only one police man was present alongside the respective party agents. There were roving teams of combined security operatives, moving round to ensure peaceful and orderly exercise. The party agents were also quite peaceful and there were no incidents of ballot box snatching. The "snatch ballot box at the expense of your life" order of the President, Muhammadu Buhari, may have contributed to the orderly conduct of the election. However, the peaceful atmosphere enjoyed nationwide during the polls was almost marred in PU 013, Rumuelemini, Choba in Obio Akpor Local Government Area when miscreants from a neighbouring community stormed the voting center. But for the timely intervention of the community people, election would have been disrupted as the hoodlums already have overpowered the two police officers who were present.

f) Functionality of the Card Reader. The Card reader proved its worth in PU 011, Ward 6 Etete Primary School, Ikpoba, Okha Local Government Area, Benin City, Edo State by detecting a voter who did multiple registration in the voters list. It is an indication that the card reader has potentials to make elections free, fair and credible in Nigeria.

Challenges

Some challenges were observed during the observation process and they include;

- 1) Late arrival of Ad-hoc staff and materials due to challenging logistics.
- 2) Absence of facility for physically challenged persons.
 - 3) Lack of proactive communication between INEC and Ad hoc staff in the polling centers.
 - 4) Inadequate security personnel in some of the polling units across the country.
 - 5) Challenges with smart card readers in most polling units across the country.

Recommendations

Based on the issues highlighted above, the underlisted recommendations are critical for consideration;

- 1) INEC should consider improving on its logistics and ensure personnel and materials arrive early in the March 9, 2019 election.
- 2) INEC should give attention to physically challenged persons across the Federation by ensuring that facilities to aid their participation in the voting exercise are provided.
- 3) As the State elections are coming up March 9, 2019, INEC should work closely with security agencies and increase the number of security personnel at the polling environment.
- 4) INEC should collaborate more with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and ensure a sustained civic and voter education exercise across the country to sustain and up the level of turn out in the March 9, 2019 election.
- 5) The slow performance of the card reader should be addressed to gain time in future elections.
- 6) Channels of communication between INEC and Ad hoc staff must be improved for next phase of the election.

Conclusion

The exercise was generally very peaceful, and the turnout was commendable. Logistics however should be improved upon in future election. Voter and civic education should be sustained and intensified to constantly remind the electorates of their civic responsibilities. Election stakeholder should continue to cooperate with INEC to enable improvement in the processes, procedure and the activities of the Commission.

Signed:

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