



Mid-day Situational Statement on the 2023 Presidential Election Saturday, February 25th, 2023 Delivered at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja

(As of 12:45 pm Saturday 25 February 2023)

Introduction

On Saturday, 25 February 2023, Yiaga Africa Watching The Vote deployed 3,836 observers across the 774 local government areas (LGAs) in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. These include 3,014 Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) observers deployed in pairs to a random, representative statistical sample of 1,507 polling units where they will remain throughout the day. This deployment will enable Yiaga Africa to independently verify the accuracy of the official presidential election results when they are announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Yiaga Africa also deployed mobile or roving observers to all the 774 Local Government Areas to capture critical incidents occurring both within and in the vicinity of polling units across the country and will also observe the process of collation in all LGA and State Results Collation Centres.

Yiaga Africa's Watching the Vote observation revealed critical challenges in the commencement of polls ranging from the late arrival of officials and delayed opening of polls to the shortage of election materials in some polling units. The late arrival of polling unit officials was exacerbated by the late deployment of the polling officials and election materials from the Registration Areas Centres (RACs) on election morning. In addition, as noted in our pre-election statement, voters who were migrated to new polling units by INEC experienced some difficulties locating their respective polling units.

On the eve of the election, Yiaga Africa also received reports of attacks in some communities in four(4) local government areas (LGA); Shiroro, Mariga, Magama and Raffi in Niger state, with Raffi LGA being the most hit. INEC relocated the polling units in the affected communities to a safer location to ensure voting continued.

Yiaga Africa Watching the Vote Mid-day Findings

Yiaga Africa's initial findings are based on reports received from 1416 of the 1,507 sampled polling units and processed at 12:45 pm on election day. Additional information and updates will be provided subsequently.

1. **Late Arrival of INEC officials and delayed commencement of polls:** In the polling units observed, Yiaga Africa observers noted the late arrival of INEC Officials at the polling unit. Our findings reveal INEC officials arrived at the polling units by **7:30 am in only 27% of polling units.**

The late opening of polling units resulted in the late commencement of accreditation and voting which varied across the geo-political zones. By **9:30 am only:** 41% of sampled polling units had commenced accreditation and voting across the country. In the respective geo-political zones only, 45% of polling units in the North-Central zone, 42% of polling units in the North East zone, 42% of polling units in the North West, 10% of polling units in the South-East zone, 29% of polling units in the South-South zone and 63% of polling units in the South West zone had commenced accreditation and voting.

2. **Challenges with locating polling units:** As anticipated in Yiaga Africa's pre-election report, voters encountered difficulties with locating polling units assigned to them by INEC following

the migration of voters to polling units. Some voters didn't receive the SMS notification sent by INEC which created confusion in some polling units.

3. **Deployment of the BVAS:** Yiaga Africa observed that the BVAS was deployed across all polling units observed. In 3% of polling units, Yiaga Africa observed the deployment of 2 or more BVAS devices. In 98% of polling units, the BVAS had zero records for the total number of accredited voters on the BVAS before the commencement of the process.
4. **Deployment of Party Agents:** All Progressives Congress (APC) party agents were sighted at 96% of polling units, Labour Party (LP) polling agents were sighted at 46% of polling units, New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) polling agents were seen at 39% of polling units, and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) at 97% of polling units.
5. **Shortfalls in election materials:** Yiaga Africa received reports of shortfalls in sensitive and non-sensitive materials such ballot papers, indelible ink and result sheets.
6. **Access to polling units:** In 31% of polling units, individuals had to climb steps or cross over gutters to access the polling units, which made it difficult for persons with disability.

Critical Incidents

As of 1:00 pm, the Yiaga Africa WTV Data Center received 40 verified critical incident reports primarily concerning the late opening of polls. Of additional note:

1. **Polling Officials declined to deploy for the elections:** In Ngor Okpala LGA in Imo State, Yiaga Africa WTV Observer reported a shortage of Adhoc staff due to poor remuneration and fear of attacks as most of the officials were corp members or students.
2. **The BVAS not authenticating the facial or fingerprint of voters:** Yiaga Africa WTV observer reported that at Gbagada Phase II /Bariga/Apelehin/Ogundero St./Onasanwo St. Junction I the BVAS failed to authenticate both the facial or fingerprint of voters which resulted in the process temporarily suspended.

Preliminary Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, Yiaga Africa WTV makes the following preliminary recommendations:

1. **Extension of voting hours:** In view of the late opening of polls coupled with the difficulties in locating polling units, Yiaga Africa calls on INEC to extend the time of voting to ensure that all eligible voters exercise their franchise. INEC should issue clear and unambiguous communication on the extension of voting time to all polling officials and the public.
2. INEC should investigate the reasons responsible for the late deployment of election materials and personnel including the late activation of the Registration Area Centers (RACs). Cases of breach of contractual obligations by transport workers should be met with sanctions.
3. INEC should implement its guidelines in cases where elections will hold the next day. Where the Commission reschedules the election to the following day, it should publish the comprehensive list of affected polling units on its online and offline platforms timeously.

4. Ensure timely response to issues raised at polling units such as malfunctioning of the BVAS and location of polling units.
5. **Ensure Compliance with the Electoral Act and INEC Guidelines:** Yiaga Africa calls on INEC polling officials to ensure strict compliance with the electoral guidelines, especially on the usage of BVAS to accredit voters and the upload of polling unit results on the INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV).
6. **Publication of Polling Units Data of PVCs Collected:** INEC should fulfil its commitment to release the polling unit level data on collected PVC on its website. Yiaga Africa notes that INEC is yet to release the comprehensive data of collected PVC per polling unit.

Yiaga Africa commends the Nigerian people for their resilience and commitment to vote in this election. We urge voters to remain patient and vigilant to ensure their votes count. We call on voters who are yet to turn out to vote to proceed to their polling units before 2:30 pm confident that the Yiaga Africa's provides timely, statistically representative information about the conduct of the election.

Yiaga Africa Watching The Vote will continue to observe the process to the end and will independently check the accuracy of the official results announced. Our observers will remain at polling units until accreditation, voting, and counting are completed, and the official results have been announced and posted by the polling officials. Yiaga Africa will issue periodic additional updates and will issue **a preliminary statement on the conduct of accreditation, voting and counting on Sunday 26 February at 10:00 am** in the Watching the Vote National Data Center at the Transcorp Hilton in Abuja. You are all kindly invited to join us at this time. WTV appeals to INEC, all security agents, political party candidates and their supporters as well as all Nigerian people to work together to ensure that the Election is credible and peaceful.

The Watching The Vote project is “**Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!**”

Thank you and God Bless the people of Nigeria!

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