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Interim Statement on the Voter Registration Exercise Tuesday February 1, 2011

Overview

Project 2011 Swift Count is a joint initiative of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN); Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas Nigeria (JDPC), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). Reflecting the diversity of Nigeria, the project brings together civic organizations and religious groups (Christian and Muslim) to promote free, fair, peaceful, credible and legitimate elections through non-partisan, independent citizen observation.

In order to achieve this goal, Project 2011 Swift Count takes traditional observation to the next level by using the latest methodologies and information and communication technologies (ICTs). For the voter registration exercise, Project 2011 Swift Count deployed 958 trained and accredited observers to every local government area (LGA) of the country who arrived at centres at 7:30 in the morning and remained there until closing. Throughout the day, they sent observation reports via coded text message to a National Information Centre (NIC) domiciled in Abuja. These real time reports captured precise and comprehensive information on whether the centres were equipped and operating, whether registration procedures were being carried out, and whether there were attempts to subvert the process.

Summary

Overall, as of Saturday January 29, the originally scheduled end for the exercise, we are encouraged by the reports of our observers on the registration process. As is widely known the voter registration exercise started extremely poorly, but has significantly improved. Anecdotal reports continue to show problems at individual registration centres, but systematic information from across the country shows a clear trend of improvement and in general the registration exercise has gone forward. While it has not been perfect, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has recognized these challenges and has acted promptly to address those shortcomings.

However, there are still problems with registration centres not opening, with the functioning of direct data capture (DDC) systems and shortages of essential materials. INEC needs to continue to work around the clock to ensure that all registration centres open and function smoothly so that all eligible Nigerians have a genuine opportunity to register.

Based on independent observations from our nearly 1,000 observers as well as the registration figures announced by INEC Chair Professor Attahiru Jega in the Senate on January 26, we are encouraged that registration has been extended for a week to ensure that all eligible Nigerians have an opportunity to vote in the important April elections.

Findings

The reports from our observers in all the LGA of the country showed that, after an extremely slow start, by the end of the second week of the exercise:

- 93% of registration centres were opened by noon;
- 86% of centres had two registration officials present;
- 82% of centres had complete DDC systems;
- 79% of centres had the DDC systems functioning throughout the day;
- 66% of centres had all essential registration materials;
- 65% of centres had sufficient materials throughout the day; and
- 86% of centres remained open throughout the day.

In two specific areas—opening times and functioning of the DDC systems--showed dramatic improvement over time. Only 18% of centres opened by noon on the first day, but this increased to 93% by the end of the first week and has remained at this level. Similarly, DDC systems went from operating properly throughout the day at 46% of centres at the start of registration to 79% by the end of the second week.

Our observers also measured how well the centres carried out the multiple processes of proper voter registration: the marking of fingers with indelible ink, photographing of registrants, issuance of temporary voter cards, entering of names into both the electronic and the manual registers. Overwhelmingly, at centres photographs were taken of registrants and names of registrants were entered into the electronic and manual registers. However, at:

- 34% of registration centres, registrants' fingers were not inked with indelible ink,
- 21% of centres temporary voter cards were not issued at the time of registration (in North West and South South our observer reported only 64% and 68% of centres issued temporary voter cards to all or most registrants).

We collected data on disruptions of the registration process in five categories—namely: attempts to disrupt the process, attempts to intimidate or harass people seeking to register, underage registration, people registering other than in their designated area, and proxy registration. In most of those categories, we found minimal instances of attempts at disruption. Despite the fact that our observers only witnessed security personnel at 44% of centres (and just 34% in North East), disturbances or intimidation were reported at only 5% of registration.

However, in two areas there were minor concerns:

- 11% of registration centres witnessed a few underage registrations,
- 8% of centres saw a few people being permitted to register even though they were not from the community.

Nationally, only 36% of registration centres had party agents present to represent the interest of their respective political parties. However, in South West the situation was very different where we reported 66% of centres had one or more party agent present.

Professor Jega announced in the Senate that as at Sunday January 23 approximately 28.5 million Nigerians had registered to vote and he expected that as of Saturday January 29 approximately 58.8 million total registrants or roughly 490 registrants per centre (based on an additional 4.3 million registrants per day will have registered). These figures are consistent with data collected directly by our observers from individual registration centres.

Recommendations

INEC announced on Saturday January 29 a one week extension of the registration exercise. Based on reports from our observers in every LGA, Project 2011 Swift Count offers the following recommendations to further boost confidence in the process.

- INEC should continue its efforts to ensure that all centres are open and properly equipped, and that all DDC systems are functional.
- INEC needs to improve its logistical and organizational capabilities for the elections since it won't have the luxury of making improvements over time as has been the case during voter registration exercise. For elections, INEC has to ensure that all centres open and operate properly on the first day because unlike voter registration there won't be another opportunity to correct any problems.
- Given the significant number of registration centres that have been unable to issue temporary voter card, INEC should ensure that all registrants receive their temporary voter card in advance of the April elections.
- INEC should make the process as transparent as possible by taking advantage of every opportunity to share information with voters, political parties and civil society organisations.
- Building on data released on the number of registrants to the Senate on January 26, INEC should now routinely provide such information. For the remaining days of registration, therefore we renew our call for INEC to release daily figures on the number of registrations per state and by LGA.
- In addition for Election Day, INEC should publicly commit itself to releasing not only aggregate results, but also polling station results for all elections. This will enable voters to determine for themselves if the official results accurately reflect the will of the voters.
- INEC needs to improve its procedures for accrediting observers (Nigerians and internationals) by ensuring there are a clear, documented and timely procedures for accreditation of observers and the adequate supply and timely provision of accreditation materials for Election Day.

Conclusion

Voting is not just a technical exercise. A properly functioning electoral system is the bedrock of any credible democracy. The National Steering Committee of Project 2011 Swift Count congratulates the people of Nigeria for their participation in the registration exercise and commends them for their patience despite noticeable imperfections. In addition, since the registration process continues, we urge those who have not registered to perform this civic duty and register, and we urge political parties and civil society organisations to encourage their members and followers to register, and to vote in the upcoming elections.

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PROJECT 2011 SWIFTCOUNT

Looking forward to Election Day, Project 2011 Swift Count will deploy approximately 8,000 observers to a representative random sample of polling stations. Each observer will send reports via coded text messages using mobile phones. This will allow Project 2011 Swift Count to quickly collect, analyse and share precise and comprehensive information on the conduct of elections with the people of Nigeria, political contestants and INEC and to verify the accuracy of the official results as announced by INEC. The Swift Count methodology has been used around the world, including Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, to help reduce political tensions and enhance confidence in the process.

Project 2011 Swift Count will continue to observe the entire electoral process, including the extension of the voter registration exercise and the display, claims and objections, and will issue statements to provide independent, non-partisan, detailed and comprehensive information to the people of Nigeria, political parties, civil society and INEC on the elections.

God Bless Nigeria.



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Learn more about Project 2011 Swift Count at www.pscnigeria.org

Chart 1: Registration Centre Opening Time by Date

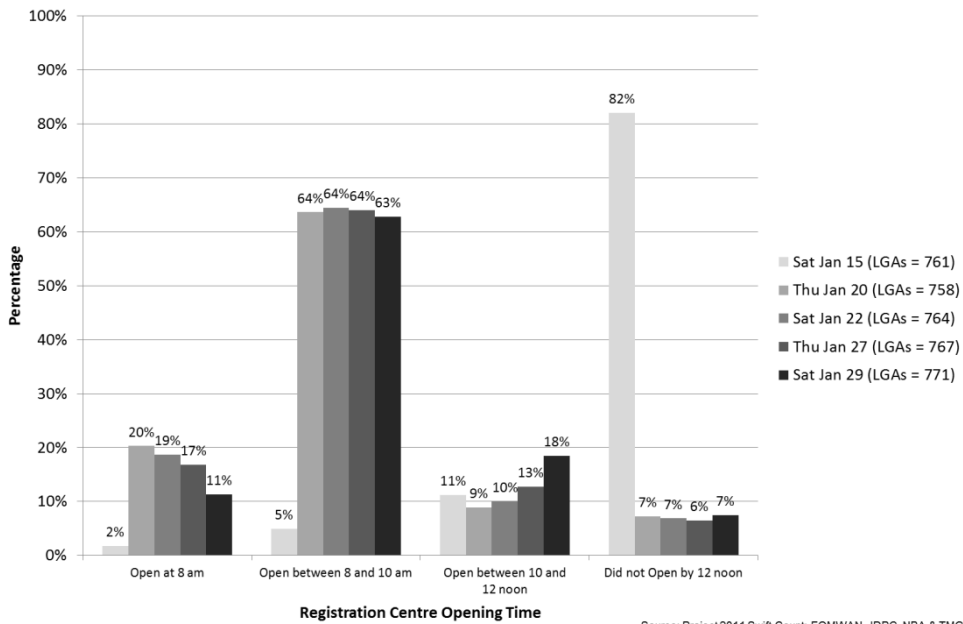


Chart 2: DDC System Functioned Properly throughout the Day by Date

