Introduction

YIAGA AFRICA Watching the Vote (WTV) for the 16th November 2019 Governorship election in Bayelsa state deployed 500 polling unit observers to a total of 250 sampled polling units in each of the eight Local Government areas with 21 mobile observers roving the LGAs in the State providing near real time information on the conduct of the election across the state. The WTV polling unit observers deployed by 7:00am to the sampled polling units and will remain at the polling unit till the close of polls and posting of results at the polling units. In order to provide accurate and timely information on the election process, YIAGA AFRICA's Watching the Vote is deploying the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) which is an advanced and proven methodology that employs well established statistical principles and utilizes sophisticated information technologies for election observation. Using this methodology, YIAGA AFRICA can independently determine if the official result announced reflects the votes cast.

In addition to the polling units and mobile observers, YIAGA AFRICA's WTV eight result collation observers will be at the LGA results collation center to observe the process and send in reports on the collation process.

YIAGA AFRICA commends those voters who have so far come out to vote despite the challenges with opening of polls and the rain. The WTV Midday situational statement based on Watching The Vote observation so far highlights findings that enables a systematic assessment of seven process-related issues which includes the: opening of polling units and presence of polling officials and Election materials; presence of security personnel, commencement of accreditation and voting; deployment of the smart card readers; and presence of party agents. It also highlights critical incidents observed that may threaten the credibility of the election.

These are preliminary findings as of 12:30 pm on election day with reports received from 229 of our 250 sampled polling units. The following data will be updated as additional reports are received from WTV observers at sampled polling units.
Watching the Vote Midday Findings

Overall, while election day is not over, YIAGA AFRICA is very concerned about reports from our citizens observers of violence and attempts to disrupt the process, late opening of polling units across Bayelsa State and vote buying. Where polling units have opened, WTV citizen observers report that they largely have the required materials.

1. As of 7:30 am, YIAGA AFRICA WTV observers reported that INEC Officials had arrived at only 24% of polling units across the state. Arrival of polling officials was identical across the three senatorial districts.
2. By 12:30 pm, only 56% of polling units had opened across the state. Opening rates again varied by LGAs. WTV citizen observers reported that 23% of polling units were open by 9am; 18% between 9am and 10am; 15% between 10am and 12 noon; 12% not open by 12 noon; and 33% not yet reporting.
3. On average open polling units had 4 polling officials present of which 2 were women.
4. 79% of open polling units had security agents present.
5. Card readers were observed in 83% of polling units.
6. Register of voters, were seen in 82% of open polling units, indelible ink (marker pen) in 79% of open polling units, official stamp in 82% of open polling units, voting cubicle in 79% of polling units, ink pad (in voting cubicle) in 82% of open polling units, Governorship Ballot box in 82% of open polling units, Polling unit booklet were present in 80% of open polling units.
7. The Braille Ballot guides were present in 28% and the PWD poster (Poster EC 30E) were present at 68% of open polling units.
8. Accord Party agents were seen at 10% of open polling units, APC party agents were seen at 83% of open polling units, and PDP at 74% of open polling units.

As of 12:30, the YIAGA AFRICA WTV Data Center had also received some verified critical incident reports:

1) **Late deployment of materials:** reports across the state indicate late commencement of polls. In Otuoke community, Ogbia LGA for instance, election materials and personnel had not deployed from the Registration Area Centres to the polling units by 9:30am. Complaints from the ad-hoc officials revealed that they were ready to deploy the night before but were held down by hoodlums in the community and the security agents were not helpful. This affected deployment.
2) **Violent Disruption of the process:** Armed thugs attacked polling units under Opolo Townhall/Community, Yenagoa LGA, shooting sporadically, disrupting the process with some casualties. Security personnel present at the time were not helpful. In addition, Political parties sharing money caused the disruption of the process in *Future Polling unit, Ward 6 (Otuaseg), Ogbia LGA.*

3) **Thugs Carting away with Election Materials and Boat Conveying Election Material:** In Ward 12 and 13 in Okpoama, Southern Ijaw LGA, some political thugs, led by the local government chairman hijacked INEC materials and disrupted the voting process. There were reports of sporadic gunshots in the polling unit. In addition, WTV received a report that a boat conveying election materials and polling officials that were deployed to 4 polling units (PUs 10, 11, 12, and 14) in Apoi Ward 15 in Kologbene Community in Southern Ijaw, was hijacked.

4) **Attack on WTV Citizen Observers and not Allowed to Observe:** WTV observers were attacked by party agents in Opolo Town Hall, Epie II Ozyi Polling Unit in Yenagoa LGA. One of the observers was beaten, their observation materials were confiscated, and they were asked to leave the polling unit.

5) **Destruction of Election Materials:** WTV also received and verified reports that fighting between party agents for APC and PDP resulted in the destruction and burning of election materials in Polling Unit 8, Ward 4 and in Ward 3 all in Ogbia LGA. Materials were also destroyed, and the process halted in PU 007, Ikarma, Okorbia, Yenagoa LGA.

**Urgent Action Recommendations**

Urgent actions are needed by INEC, security agencies and political parties to restore calm and ensure all eligible voters have an opportunity to vote.

**INEC**

1) YIAGA AFRICAs WTV calls on INEC to extend voting time from 2pm to 5pm due to the late commencement of polls to ensure all registered voters have a reasonable opportunity to vote.

2) INEC should investigate the high reports of materials being carted away and destroyed in some wards and for some polling units and ensure that votes are not recorded for those polling units. INEC should postpone voting for those locations to enable voters to participate the following day.
3) INEC should as a matter of urgency coordinate with the security agencies to provide adequate security for the polling officials deployed across the state especially in hot spot LGAs. This is also very important for the collation process.
4) INEC officials should act in utmost sense of responsibility and professionalism and must remain neutral at all times.

Security
1) YIAGA AFRICA calls on the security agencies to effectively deploy to secure the election materials and the INEC officials deployed in the field, especially from communities where observer groups have sent in reports of disruption of the process. This includes ensuring proper inter-agency coordination for effective protection of lives and properties, and in securing the process especially in the creeks.
2) Security agents should ensure that individuals disrupting the process and buying votes are arrested.
3) Security agencies should ensure that its personnel acts in utmost professionalism and remain impartial throughout the conduct of this election

Political Parties
1) YIAGA AFRICA calls on contesting political parties and candidates to stop their supporters from disrupting the process.
2) YIAGA AFRICA calls on political parties, candidates and their supporters to refrain from disrupting the process and attempts to undermine the elections.
3) Political parties and candidates should refrain from buying votes as the process continues.

Conclusion
YIAGA AFRICA WTV is fully prepared to observe and provide timely information as the process continues in Bayelsa. Our observers will continue to watch the process until the end of voting and the posting of results. In addition, our LGA result collation observers will be at the LGA result collation Centre’s to observe the process and provide information on the results collation.

We call on the good people of Bayelsa state, especially the voters to not be deterred by the challenges but rather to remain patient until they cast their votes.

YIAGA AFRICA with her citizens observers is observing the election on behalf of the people of Bayelsa and Nigerians, to ensure that the people’s votes are accurately counted.
We call on all people of Bayelsa, the parties and candidates, INEC and the security agencies to play their parts to ensure a peaceful, credible and conclusive process.

Thank you and God Bless the people of Bayelsa State.

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