



PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 2023 DISTRICT- LEVEL ELECTIONS AND UNIT COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

CONTACT

Mr. Albert Arhin

CODEO National Coordinator

Phone: +233 (0) 24 474 6791 / (0) 20 822 1068

Secretariat: +233 (0) 244 350 266/ 0277 744 777

Email: info@codeoghana.org

Website: www.codeoghana.org

Friday, December 22, 2023

Introduction

The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) conducted District Assembly and Unit Committee Elections on Tuesday, December 19, 2023. As part of its efforts to promote transparent and credible electoral processes and outcomes, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) trained and deployed Election Day observers in 55 districts across the 16 regions of Ghana. CODEO appreciates all observers who volunteered to participate in this observation exercise.

Unlike previous CODEO deployments which followed a national representative random sampling approach, this year's deployment was based on non-probability (convenient) sampling. Therefore this preliminary report reflects observations from specific polling stations in the districts where CODEO observers observed the elections. Out of a total of 420 observers that CODEO deployed, a maximum of 308 (73.3%) (comprising 293 stationary observers and 15 roaming observers) submitted observation reports covering all phases of the Election-Day processes. This preliminary statement is based on analyses of 308 reports on the opening and set-up; 266 reports on the voting processes; and 281 reports from CODEO observers on counting processes as of 9:00 pm on Election Day of 19th December 2023.

Generally, CODEO observers reported that the polls observed opened on time in most places and officials adhered to the set-up and opening protocols. More importantly, reports from observers indicate that the voting processes were also largely peaceful and incident-free. However, some observers were unable to observe proceedings due to the EC's inability to organise elections in some electoral areas.

Summary of Findings

Set-Up and Opening of Polls

- Almost all CODEO Observers (99.3%) who observed the opening of polls were granted access to polling stations and were able to carry out their observation duties on Election Day without any constraints.
- Observers reported that two-thirds (65.6%) of polling stations opened by 7:15am, while another 19.5% opened between 7:16am and 8:00am. Less than one in 10 (8.4%) polling

stations opened between 8:01am and 10:00 am and only a few (4.2%) polling stations opened after 10:00am or never opened (2.3%).

- Observers indicated that a majority (92.5%) of polling stations were set up in a manner that ensured that ballots were cast in secret. A significant majority of polling stations (92.5%) were accessible to persons with mobility challenges and the elderly, while approximately 7.5% were not accessible.
- The elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers and persons with disabilities were given priority in the voting queue at 95.1% of polling stations observed.

Voting Process

- In almost all (99.2%) of polling stations, CODEO observers who reported on the voting process indicated that ballot papers were stamped with the validating stamp.
- The Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) functioned well at 76.7% of polling stations, while 23.3% polling stations encountered instances where the BVDs failed to function at some point in time on Election Day.
- At six in 10 (59%) polling stations, observers indicated that no eligible voter had their fingerprints rejected by the BVDs. At approximately 32.5% of polling stations, a few (1-5) eligible voters had their fingerprints rejected by the BVDs. Such polling stations included: Sakuba in Kumbungu, Nima Mosque in Asokore Mampong and Ekutuase in Ajumako Enyan Essiam.
- Observer reports showed that in some 96.4% of polling stations, there were no attempts to harass or intimidate officials, voters, or polling agents at any time during the voting process, while 3.6% of polling stations witnessed some attempts of harassment and intimidation of voters and poll officials.
- Almost four in 10 (39.5%) observers reported “minor” problems encountered during the voting processes, while close to six in 10 (59.4%) Observers said they did not encounter any problem. Not more than 1.1% of observers reported “major” problems encountered during the voting processes at polling stations.

Closing of Polls

- At the close of polls at 5:00pm, there was no one in queue at 33.8% of polling stations in respect of observers who observed the closing of polls and counting. In 58.0% polling stations most voters in queues by 5:00pm were allowed to cast their ballots.
- Nine in 10 (91.8%) of polling stations had sufficient lighting during counting while the remaining 8.2% did not.
- Candidates’ agents were permitted to observe the counting process in a majority (95.7%) of polling stations observed.
- At 98.9% of polling stations, CODEO observers agreed with the vote count for the District Assembly Elections. Also, candidates’ agents signed the declaration of results for the District Assembly Elections at 91.8% of the polling stations.
- There were 4.3% requests for recount of ballot papers for the District Assembly Elections and 1.4% for the Unit Committee Elections at the polling stations.

Reported Incidents

CODEO observers reported a total of 46 incidents on Election Day. These include:

- Voters’ inability to vote on Election Day due to the unavailability of election materials in some parts of Wa, Birim South, Guan, Suhum Municipal, Denkyembour, Akyem Swedru, Fantekwa North and Ajumako Enyan Essiam, among others.

- Delayed voting in some polling stations in Ejura-Sekyedumase due to the late arrival of voting materials, and Nkwabeng Municipality, where a different ballot paper for the Assembly elections was brought to the center. This was however rectified within 30 minutes.
- Failure of BVDs to accurately verify fingerprints of voters delayed voting process in some areas including Kumbungu and Asokore Mampong Municipal.
- Minor verbal altercations between agents and polling officials at some polling stations. At the Juaben Slaughterhouse, a candidate’s agent alleged that the presiding officer favours one of the candidates therefore, he threatened to disrupt the voting process if the presiding officer continued to assist voters in casting their vote.
- A voter on the roll of Islamic Polling Station “A” underwent the verification process at his stipulated polling station, but dropped their ballot paper into a ballot box at Islamic Polling Station “B”.

Conclusion

CODEO’s preliminary findings of the local government elections suggest that in areas the polls took place it was conducted in a free, fair, transparent and peaceful manner. However, reported incidents of BVDs failures, delays in the start of polls and the EC ‘s inability to communicate changes in the elections with the public in a timely manner affected the conduct of the polls. Lastly, the failure to consult, seek buy-in and communicate clearly a decision to not use indelible ink for the exercise created concerns about the integrity of the process. This was particularly worrying given the malfunctioning of the BVD in some pollings stations.

Recommendations

The EC must prioritize consensus building and public discourse on its reform agenda to avoid surprises at the polls where most voters may first get to know about changes in election protocols. This is necessary to prevent tension and doubts about the integrity of election processes and outcomes.

The EC must take the necessary measures to improve on the delivery of election materials and ensure the timely start of polls.

About CODEO

CODEO is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations and professional bodies which observe Ghanaian elections. It was established in 2000 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize citizens of Ghana to participate in the electoral process actively and to complement the efforts of Ghana’s Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. The Coalition of 42-member organizations has grown to become the largest and most credible domestic election observer body in Ghana which mobilizes citizens and groups to participate in Ghana’s electoral processes.

Signed:

Albert Arhin,
National Coordinator, CODEO

Gildfred Asiamah
0248586940

Joseph Oti Frimpong
0241986067