



**Pan
African Women
Projects**

AN INTERIM REPORT



PAN AFRICAN WOMEN PROJECTS



**LIBERIA 2023 PRESIDENTIAL/
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

HELD:

10TH OCTOBER, 2023.

PAWP.. "ONE PEOPLE, ONE VISION, ONE GOAL"

INTERIM REPORT OF PAN AFRICAN WOMEN PROJECTS, INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER GROUP AT LIBERIA 2023 PRESIDENTIAL / PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD 10TH OCTOBER, 2023.

Preamble

The 2023 Liberian Presidential and parliamentary elections will indeed have regional implications for West Africa, as successful elections within this coastal region can provide a positive electoral template in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2020, the West African region has faced democratic backsliding, with the ECOWAS governments of Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Gabon and Niger toppled by military juntas.

A successful election in Liberia could counter negative perceptions of governance within the ECOWAS region. Successful elections in Liberia will also set a positive example for African continent in general as it will promote social and economic development in the continent.

The lessons learnt in this election will translate largely to the peace of the nations in Africa.

ORGANIZATION

Pan African Women Projects (PAWP) is an international non-governmental organisation of African women from the fifty-four (54) nations of Africa and the Diaspora.

Our head office is situated in Johannesburg, South Africa and regional offices in the five (5) regions of Africa with Nigeria as the hub for West Africa. Our primary mission amongst others is to promote good governance and sustainable democracy in Africa through developmental projects for women, youths and persons with disabilities in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Pan African Women Projects (PAWP) is one of the unbiased and independent Foreign Observer missions accredited by National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia for the 2023 Liberian Presidential and parliamentary elections.

We have observed several elections in about seventeen (17) countries in Africa.

We have a mission team comprising mainly of women from various African nations that were deployed to various county's in Liberia for election observations.

For the 2023 Elections, our organisation observed the Presidential /Parliamentary Elections held on the 10th October, 2023 and a final reports and recommendations will be submitted to the National Elections

Commission (NEC) after the run-off elections.

THE ELECTION

The Liberian 2023 Presidential and parliamentary elections were remarkable. Twenty (20) Presidential candidates, seventy-three (73) candidates of the lower house and fifteen (15) candidates for the Senate in a country with 5.4 million population, 2,471,617 registered voters as published by the National Elections Commission (NEC) in the Final Registration Roll (FRR) to vote in 5,890 polling places. Thirty-one political parties nominated 1,128 candidates for different offices, while 195 independent candidates contested in several polls.

The Presidential race was keenly contested. We observed a strong opposition led by the former Vice President of Liberia, Mr. Joseph Biokai of the Unity Party giving the incumbent President George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) a close marking as we have seen from the final results announced by the National Elections Commission(NEC) .The final results of the Presidential Elections released by the electoral commission and announced by the Chairperson of NEC, Madam Davidetta Browne Lansanah had the current President Mr. George Weah leading with 804,087 votes ,being 43.83% followed very closely by Mr. Joseph Biokai the Presidential candidate of the Unity Party with 796,961

votes being 43.44% , a margin that is slim. The October 10th Presidential election has ended in a

Run-off election that will be held on the 14th of November, 2023 as none of the 20 Presidential candidates has up to 50.1 % votes to be declared a winner according to the constitution of Liberia in producing an elected President. The Presidential run-off election will by this result be between President George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and Mr. Joseph Biokai of the Unity Party (UP). None of the eighteen (18) other candidates had up to 4% votes.

OUR KEY OBSERVATIONS

1.ARRIVAL OF MATERIALS

We observed that materials had arrived most polling stations before 7am in the morning across the country at this election except for very few County's that experienced late arrival of materials due to poor road network and natural disaster caused by flooding where the materials could not be taken to due to the flood that made the area inaccessible.

2.TURN OUT OF VOTERS

This election recorded a huge turnout, a sort of revolution in nature as voters were so eager to cast their votes and many were even at the polling station as early as 3am waiting for the exercise to commence.

3.CAPACITY OF ADHOC STAFF

We observed that the ADHOC staff at the polling units we visited majorly were very professional at their job. They were matured in handling the overwhelming crowd that turned out to vote even with the difficulty in making the crowd be in queue, yet they managed to conduct the elections peacefully.

However, some ADHOC STAFF and Electoral Officers need more training especially in identification of the genuine voters from the voters register, sorting and inability to reconcile the invalid votes.

4. SECURITY

We observed that the security personal was not found at some polling unit we visited. For instance at R.C. LAWSON school in Congo Town the security personal was overwhelmed at the intimidating crowd and was found outside the premises allowing the crowd to be uncontrollable and the young adhoc staff were almost getting choked as the crowd refused to stand on a queue making the electoral process very slow.

Also, at this polling station we observed the difficulty pregnant women and baby Mamas had in assessing the polling station due to lack of security personal to control the crowd.

We also observed poor security presence at Mcguire Catholic School, Keneja, Rehab.

At Lands Mission polling station in district 6, the security personal were overwhelmed by the huge turnout especially during the morning hours as we observed. This experience was also observed by our observers that visited Nimba, Lofa, and Bong county's.

5. WOMEN PARTICIPANON

On 11 May 2023, political parties and the National Elections Commission (NEC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which signals political parties' commitment to nominating women in a minimum 30% of their candidate listings in the upcoming 2023 General Elections. This commitment demonstrates their support for women's political participation and was a significant step toward promoting gender equality and women's political representation.

The signing of the 30% Gender Quota MoU between the political parties and the NEC of Liberia is a positive step towards holding political parties accountable for promoting gender equality and women's political representation but we observed that the 30% quota was not fully implemented by the political parties at this election.

Out of 1,025 candidates only 159 candidates participated at the Liberia 2023 Elections a figure lower than the previous election.

6. MEDIA PARTICIPATION

Media presence in the Liberian 2023 elections cannot be overemphasised. We have observed that election activities from campaigns, activities of the electoral body, election day coverage and now the tallying procedures are all in the media space providing information to the public which is highly commendable.

We also observed that the major political parties were the ones mostly heard in the news especially talk shows, interviews etc.

We also observed news of unnecessary tension created from the social media and other electronic media stations at this election especially before and after the election, and even in the process of announcing the result by the National Elections Commission.

7. OBSERVERS/ CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

This election had about ten thousand (10,000) International and domestic Observer groups and also Civil Society Groups that participated at this election. The process of accreditation and participation by different groups on the field and the reports and recommendations will offer an improvement in subsequent elections in Liberia.

8.OPENING/ CLOSING OF POLL:

At this election, we observed that the polling stations were opened between the hours of 8. 00am to 8. 45am.

We also observed that the closing of many polling units was determined by the number of voters on the queue not necessarily with any time frame.

9.COUNTING OF VOTES

The vote count was transparent as we observed all party agents (poll observers) sited to watch the procedures right into the night, and in some places till early morning hours.

10.PERSON WITH DISSABILITIES (PWDS)

We observed a huge turn-out of persons with disabilities at this election. The inaccessibility of certain polling stations by some persons with disabilities especially those on wheel chairs was a big challenge.

For instance, Polling Stations at the National Library, District 7, Payneville School, District 6, Mason Centre, District 10 we observed the difficulty those on wheel chairs encountered in accessing the polling stations due to high stair cases.

11.ANNOUNCEMENT/ DECLARATION OF RESULT

This procedure was indeed slow at this election. ELections were held on the 10th of October, 2023 and final results announced on the 24th of October, 2023 . We observed so much tension in the country as many businesses were not opening out of fear of the unknown as many were waiting for the outcome of the election result.

12. VIOLENCE / INTIMIDATION

This election experienced pocket of violence and intimidation in some county's before the elections between political party supporters but our observer team never witnessed any violence but all information gathered were reported as news.

13. VOTING WITHOUT CARDS

We observed at this election that some persons turn up at the polling stations with excuses of loss of voter cards but with a serial number to vote.

Some voters also appeared at the polling stations with their cards to vote but someone else had voted early using the same serial number and without a card. These occurred in Bong County, Mountserrado County etc.

14. BALLOT PAPER DESIGN

We observed the design of the ballot papers used for the Presidential and National Assembly Elections, carried the party symbol as well as the names and pictures of the candidates for Presidential, Senate and the House of Representatives candidates. This assisted many voters to quickly identify their candidate of choice and cast their votes accordingly.

We commend the NEC for this laudable

design as we recommend this ballot paper design to other electoral commissions in Africa and the Diaspora as these had reduced many void votes at this election.

15. PROMPT ACTION /ARREST OF ELECTORAL OFFENDERS

We observed the NEC prompt action in arresting all electoral offenders at this election. From the arrest of NEC temporal staff caught in electoral malpractice to the arrest of persons caught in snatching ballot boxes in Nimba County is highly commendable.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ACCESSIBILITY OF PRECINTH ON ELECTION DAY BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON THE WHEEL CHAIR

We recommend that the electoral commission provide at least a desk to attend to persons with disabilities who are on a wheel chair and will not be

able to climb staircases at polling stations where they are challenges with high staircases. For instance National Library Precinith, District 7 and many others.

2. POLICE DEPLOYMENT

We recommend more than one police or paramilitary personal to be deployed to ALL precinith to ensure that voters are peaceful and most especially stand in a simple queue.

Ability to make voters to stand in a simple queue in the next election will ensure a smooth and speedy voting processes.

3.E VOTING

We recommend **Introduction of E-Voting: Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)**. We observed during this election that NEC still struggle with the tallying process. This is so because the process of voting, counting and collating votes in this election is still manually done and this causes significant problems and created doubt in the integrity and credibility of the entire election process even with our continuous interactions with the media and some electorate, the E Voting is an answer to the long wait of tallying and announcements of results. With the introduction of E-Voting, NEC will serve costs and eliminate completely ballots paper. The Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), will end the paper ballots method which is widely criticized because of its fraudulent voting and booths capturing by political thugs and party loyalists. It is important to note that several countries like the UK, the US, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Malaysia, and even Namibia in Africa had since switched to e-voting system and we believe that it can happen here in Liberia especially with the population of the country.

4.OBSERVER ACCREDITATION TAG

We recommend that the NEC should print accreditation tags for observer groups with the photographs of the individual on the card for proper identification to avoid abuse of the observation procedures by politicians and persons who flood the polling station with various tags that are not even accredited by NEC.

5.PLACEMENT OF VOTER EDUCATION MATERIALS AT POLLING STATIONS

We recommend that voter education materials showing a diagram of different steps of voting procedures be placed in each precinct on the wall to enable voters who are not really literate to understand how to cast their vote. This will minimise invalid and void votes and unnecessary distraction of the adhoc staff and electoral officials on the election day.

6.PUBLICATION OF VOTER REGISTER

We recommend to the NEC that the voter register be published again before the Runoff election and also at subsequent elections, the voters register be published a month before the election giving the voters enough time to check the list and identify their polling station before election day.

7.TRAINING OF ADHOC/ ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

We recommend that the NEC pay attention to the training of the ADHOC STAFF and ELECTORAL OFFICIALS as these persons carry the image of the electoral commission. We recommend that the electoral officers be trained to identify the voter by his image on his card not dwelling by the serial numbers alone. Persons who appear in a polling station without a voter card with an excuse that it is lost must not be allowed to vote because it is possible to get any body's serial number with a flimsy excuse of lost of card.

8. APPEARANCES OF POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS AT TALLY CENTRES.

We recommend that at briefings of the electoral commission and political parties, the NEC should advise the politicians to stay away from tally centers as all political parties have representatives and their presence at the tally centers speak volumes.

SUMMARY

The Liberian 2023 Elections was historic and peaceful. The electoral processes at various polling stations we observed across the country which include voting procedures, sorting, counting and tallying was indeed transparent and in tandem International best practice

We applaud the National Elections Commission Liberia, the Chairperson of the commission Madam Davidetta Browne Lansanah, board of Commissioners and Staff for their hard work and commitments in sustaining democracy in Liberia and the good conduct of the just concluded election.

We look forward to the electoral body having interactions with Observer groups and the Civil Society Groups that observed the just concluded elections to address areas of urgent improvement and take necessary actions in implementation of positive actions that will enhance the success of the forth coming Presidential Run-off elections.

Our final and comprehensive reports will be sent to the electoral commission after the run-off elections.

Thank you for giving Pan African Women Projects an opportunity to be part of your democratic process and change.



Dr (Mrs) Eno Ben Udensi
Head of Mission
PAN AFRICAN WOMEN PROJECTS.

Observation Photo



Pan African Women Projects

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVERS



LIBERIANS
YOUR VOTE IS YOUR
VOICE
COME OUT AND VOTE
PEACEFULLY



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The Center for
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OBSERVATION PHOTO





Pan African Women Projects

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