

**ELECTION MONITORING  
REPORT**

**COMPILED BY THE NETWORK OF MOBILE**

**ELECTION MONITORS (NMEM)**

**ON THE**

**NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

**HELD ON**

**APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2007**

## **Introduction**

The idea of using mobile phones to monitor Elections was developed by NMEM and we are proud to announce to the world that it was extremely successful. We also recommend that other organizations and countries study our project, and plan to use it in their own future Elections.

The primary goal of the project was to use technology to give the ordinary citizen an opportunity to tell the world what really happened in their area on Election Day. The spread and reach of mobile telephony in Nigeria is mind boggling: in the last 4 years more than 30 million Nigerians have become mobile phone users.

Traditionally Election observers and monitors deemed credible are often foreign diplomats, bureaucrats and professionals who are sent to visit as many polling stations as they can and inform the world of their impression of the polls. Their effectiveness is limited to the number of places they can visit in a just one day: in a country as vast as Nigeria (Land mass – 925,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 140 million); without maps or road signs to use in Navigation, these Foreign observers often limit their activities to Abuja (the Nations Capital), Lagos and a few major State Capitals. Places like the Niger Delta with its reputation for violence and kidnapping of Foreigners are no go areas.

It should be noted that most Election observers especially in Africa are very conspicuous with their UN or EU branded 4 wheel drive jeeps, 'branded' t-shirts with "observers" boldly printed on it and large ID tags around their necks. This is often necessary for security reasons which

allows them to move around freely on Election Day where movement is often restricted. This, however, reduces their effectiveness as people are prone to act properly when they know they are being watched, especially by foreigners.

This is why we decided to use ordinary citizens of Nigeria, all voters themselves to report back to our SMS hub on what really happened on Election Day from their own polling stations. The use of ordinary Nigerians to observe and report on the election we believe encourages participation by people that would be apathetic as well as provide timely, accurate and impartial information on the conduct of the elections. It is worth noting that it is ultimately the same ordinary citizens who validate the credibility and legitimacy of the eventual electoral outcome. Our monitoring is peculiar because people knew that if they try to rig the election there could be someone behind them that may send a text message reporting the incident.

## **The network, and how it works**

The Network of Mobile Election Monitors (NMEM) is organized by the Human Emancipation Lead Project (HELP) Foundation. With the assistance of Professionals for Humanity (PROFOH) another Nigerian NGO, the Network started out with 54 associates resident in each of the 36 states of the country, and Abuja. These associates were trained to recruit volunteers from their states and instruct them to forward our (SMS Text) invitation to as many people as possible to create a nationwide spread.

## **Technology**

The Technology behind this project was made possible using a SMS hub called FrontlineSMS, developed by [kiwanja.net](http://kiwanja.net), to keep track of all of the texts. The system allows mass-messaging to mobile phones and crucially the ability for recipients to reply to a central computer. Thanks to the system we could acknowledge receipt of the text (SMS) and even make specific enquiry to individual volunteers and associates in any area to confirm the authenticity of reports received.

The software also was able to alert us when a report came in from our associates or hitherto unknown volunteer allowing us to rank the accuracy of the information received. Although the software performed brilliantly we would have loved it to have the ability to make allowance for multimedia service (MMS) as a few of our associates took pictures on camera phones and could only forward them to us via the internet.

## **Election Day**

Election Day started out for the technical support staff at 8:30am. Our first task was to send a reminder SMS alert to our associates urging them to personally go to their designated polling stations and to file their report by 12 noon. The first SMS (text) report to come through the network was on the eve of the presidential election at 11:06pm, alerting NMEM of skirmishes between soldiers of the Nigerian Army and unknown militants around government house Yenengoa, Bayelsa state.

The first positive reports started to arrive at 2pm with reports of calm and orderliness in Ibiono Ibom L.G.A in Akwa Ibom State, and also from Kano GRA, Kano state. From then on, we were flooded with reports from Nigerians who reported as events unfold during the election. The observations below represent a mix of text messages sent in by respondent:

- Calm and orderliness
- Late arrival of polling materials
- Absence of names of registered voters on official voter lists
- Early arrival INEC officials and members of the Civil Defense Corp
- Voting without proper documents and identification
- Extension of voting hours to augment for late opening
- Absence of polling booths for voters confidentiality
- Stuffing of ballot boxes
- Casting away of voting materials
- Poor voter turnout
- Harassment and intimidation of voters
- Ill-equipped security personnel

Our analysis indicates that extensive fraud and rigging were perpetrated by participating political parties in their areas of control. In total over 10,000 messages were received into the SMS hub.

## Observer feedback

The need to readily communicate with the Nigerian electorate was the prime motivation in choosing text messaging as the communications method for our work.

Sequel to the announcement of the presidential election result on Monday the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007, text messages were sent out to our respondent asking for their reaction on the acceptability of the result and the president-elect. While about a fifth of our respondents wanted the results cancelled, the majority (about 80%) reacted that Nigeria could not afford cancellation and re-run. Rather Nigerians want those who are aggrieved to seek peaceful redress at the election tribunals.

Curiously, some of the respondents that reported electoral fraud in their locations believe that the President-elect should be given a chance. One message, which was typical of a number we received, indicated that *“Gov. Yar Adua is generally acceptable as President mainly because of his lack of military antecedence, relative record of transparency as Governor of Katina State and the calibre of opposition he had”*.

It is our belief that with adequate funding we can educate and inform the public to take part in exit polls at future elections. Due to inadequate funding we were unable to have our associates follow up at the ward collation center, or Local Government Areas and INEC state offices, where the tallies were added up. Most of our observations were limited to the polling stations.

## Sample text messages

Below are a few selected messages received from our observers:

"At ward 4 and 5 of Calabar Municipality materials arrived at about 9:45am. Voting started by 10am prompt. All the security agencies and party representatives were all present and voting was conducted orderly though the electorate turn out was low"

"Almost all result sheets diverted by PDP stalwarts and INEC ad-hoc staff on the way to wards polling stations in Nsukka Enugu State. By Raph. A. N."

"EVERYWHERE IS CALM VOTING IS ON. MOVEMENT IS RESTRICTED FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ELECTION PROCESS."

"I want to commend the efforts of INEC and for making this election come to pass in the face of every challenge. Amigag"

"Dear Mobile Election Monitor team I am sending this text from UK. There is a huge irregularity of voting at Gwande Karfa ward. In Bokkos LGC. TAKE NOTE. NAPHTALI"

Time was 10:20 4 areas-badawa kawo daurawa n race-course.d is ordalinss pati agents prsent n polic civil dfenc n inec observas; rsult lata.votin stil prgrsin n wel paticipatd"

"I admired how the Hotoro south Primary school ward Presidential election was conducted it was free & fair. Good luck to the winner."

## **Conclusions**

The just concluded election and subsequent handing over of power on May 29<sup>th</sup> will mark the first time in Nigerian history that power has been transfer from one elected president to another.

Our report indicates fraud and other irregularities in the elections, and this has been collaborated by report of foreign and other domestic observers. However, there were pockets of hope in places where elections were orderly, free and fairly conducted as earlier mentioned in this report. These area needs to be commended for their vigilance and commitment to their civic responsibilities. We however believe that the wish of the people was honoured and the most popular candidate returned. Though the election was flawed, many Nigerians shared their views with us, and we believe that this practice will greatly assist in determining the legitimacy of this and future elections in this country. We are very happy we helped give the people a voice via text messaging.

## **Recommendations**

- Government must make every effort not to be overly partisan in the electoral process
- INEC must be made totally autonomous as regards its finances, appointment of its managerial personnel and its powers, and all aspects of the electoral process must be well articulated
- The political parties must be provided with irrevocable standards and timeline to present to their candidates



- The judiciary must be sacrosanct about the laws of the land and be sensitive to the integrity of candidates before clearances to run in the elections
- The legislator must be pro-active in its monitoring of the electoral process, and the election commission
- The Nigerian people require more sensitization on their civic responsibility, which should not be restricted to election period only

### **Post-election NMEM project**

NMEM is convinced that elections and good governance are fundamental and sacrosanct in the democratic process. As such the monitoring and evaluation of an elected government by the governed becomes essential to the process.

In developing countries like Nigeria the challenges of the lack of institutionalized agencies to monitor and ensure good governance or its access and optimal engagement by the ordinary citizens is of great concern due to the almost malignancy of the abuse of office by the political elites. Intervention in the democratic process should therefore not wane after elections but become more resolute in the delivery of democratic dividends to the citizenry.

NMEM has started a process which aims to provide Nigerians a platform to express their aspirations, monitor and evaluate the performances of the elected government and the public office holders in the bid to ensuring good governance. NMEM has created templates of enquiry regarding Nigerians aspirations and expectations of the newly elected government and public officers.

### **Good Governance Monitoring Project**

This phase of the NMEM project has two sub-divisions and is being developed to provide Nigerians with the channels to express aspirations and expectation of the incoming government, and engage directly in the assessment of the government and the performance of the public office holders.

The essence of this phase is to check the abuse of public trust (office) by political office holders. Firstly, NMEM will reach out to Nigerians via the mass media for Nigerians to articulate their aspirations/expectations through SMS to NMEM computer hub. Messages will be catalogued and presented to the political office holders of respective constituencies. NMEM hopes this will strengthen the already established covenant between the representatives and their constituencies as already contained in their manifestos.

Although NMEM is challenged by the enormity of the project, the project hopes to identify partners who would share in this commendable intervention - to ensure good governance in Nigeria as a model of true democracy to other developing nations of the world.

For further information on the Good Governance Monitoring Project please contact:

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For and on behalf of The Network of Mobile Election Monitors (NMEM), Nigeria

*Kufre Ekere*  
C.E.O  
Human Emancipation Lead Project

## NMEM KEY OFFICERS

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## USEFUL LINKS

1. BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6570919.stm>
2. kiwanja.net: <http://www.kiwanja.net>
3. FrontlineSMS: <http://www.frontlinesms.com>
4. NMEM: <http://www.mobilemonitors.org>
5. BBC Digital Planet: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4849402.stm>

## Texts monitor Nigerian elections

**Anyone trying to rig or tamper with Saturday's presidential elections in Nigeria could be caught out by a team of volunteers armed with mobile phones.**

The Network of Mobile Election Monitors (NMEM) will use SMS to feedback their observations to a central computer hub.

The collected text messages will then be passed on to other monitoring groups and authorities including the EU.

NMEM hopes the system will stop fraud, especially in areas considered too dangerous for other groups to enter.

"We want to set a precedent," said Emauwa Nelson of the Human Emancipation Lead Project, a Nigerian NGO that helped set up the project.

"We want people to know that if they are trying to rig the election, there could be someone behind them and that person may send a text message saying what happened."

### Democratic process

Voting is due to take place on Saturday to elect a new president to succeed Olusegun Obasanjo.

#### **NIGERIAN ELECTION 21 APRIL**

**60m** registered voters

**120,000** ballot boxes

**360** House of Representative seats to be elected

**109** Senate seats to be elected

**24** presidential candidates

Main contenders:

- **Atiku Abubakar** for the AC, 60 years old
- **Muhammadu Buhari**, ANPP, 64
- **Umaru Musa Yar'Adua**, PDP, 55

Polls open at **0800** (local time) and close at **1500**

To avoid a run-off, a candidate needs the highest number of votes overall and at least 25% of votes in 24 of the 36 states

It is the first time since independence in 1960 that power is being transferred from one civilian president to another.

The outgoing leader has urged election officials to prevent rigging.

"The world is watching us and we cannot afford to disappoint ourselves, our friends and the world," said Mr Obasanjo.

European Union observers are in Nigeria to make sure that the vote is fair and legal.

NMEM has been set up independently of the EU to allow ordinary citizens to take part.

"It allows everybody the chance to be part of this process," said Mr Nelson.

"By monitoring with SMS we can get a true picture of what happens."

### Broadcast tool

The system takes advantage of Nigeria's 30 million mobile phone users.

The volunteers, all voters themselves, will be able to text observations to  **0808-4032739** .

Observations from more than one volunteer in each area will be cross checked to make sure they are accurate.

NMEM is using a free system called Frontline SMS, developed by programmer Ken Banks, to keep track of all of the texts.

Originally developed for conservationists to keep in touch with communities in National Parks in South Africa, the system allows mass-messaging to mobile phones and crucially the ability to reply to a central computer.

It has already been used in countries such as Zimbabwe as a way of bypassing broadcast restrictions and distributing information to rural communities.

In Nigeria the system will be used differently.

"They're not using it to broadcast messages, they're more interested in how it can bring information in," said Mr Banks.

The collected information will then be sent to monitoring groups and the EU observers.

NMEM does not know how many people will take part but are confident that the system will add an extra layer of transparency to the Presidential and other elections.

"This will help to stop rigging and give Nigeria the chance to have better elections in the future," said Nelson.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/technology/6570919.stm>

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