

Few voters dampen LC poll mood

Low turnout. Voters at most polling stations in Acholi sub-region started trickling in past 9am.

BY MONITOR TEAM
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

ACHOLI. Unlike the presidential and parliamentary elections where voters flocked polling stations as early as 6:30am despite late arrival of voting materials, yesterday's district chairperson's elections were the opposite, with miserable voter turnout across the electoral areas.

Most polling stations in Acholi sub-region where *Daily Monitor* visited, presiding officers attested to receiving voting materials by 6:30am, but few people turned out to cast their vote.

In other stations, the polling officials had not received a single voter by 9am.

At Commercial Road Polling Station in Pece Division Gulu Municipality, voting opened at 7am, but polling agents looked relaxed as a handful of voters came to vote.

Meagre numbers

By 9am, only 68 voters had cast their votes at the polling station out of the 878 registered voters.

Mr Clarine Acellam, the presiding officer at the polling station, said there was general low morale among the voters.

At Kasubi B-L Polling Station in Bardege Division, the voting exercise started by 9:18 am. The presiding officer, Ms Brenda Acayo, said they waited for at least five people to turn up at the polling station to witness the ballot box opening although the polling station had opened as early as 7am.

At Kasubi P-Z Polling Station, where majority of UPDF soldiers vote from, by 9:34am, none of the officers had turned up.



Polling officials at Kasubi A-AL Polling Station in Gulu District yesterday. PHOTOS BY STEPHEN OKELLO

Mr Simon Okwera, the presiding officer, said by 9:34am, only 15 out of 405 registered voters had cast their vote.

In Kitgum Municipality, most of the polling stations opened by 7am but it was a similar scenario of low voter turnout.

At Kitgum Public Primary School Polling Station, voters were reporting in handfuls to cast their vote.

In Nwoya District, Anaka Town Council, the presiding officer, Mr Geoffrey Banya, reported a similar situation and said the polling station opened at 7am, but only 74 of the 627 registered voters had cast their vote by 10am.

Mishap

At Lacor Hospital AP-M Polling Station in Bardege Division, voting began late at about 9am after polling agents discovered one of the ballot boxes had been broken and could not be used. The box was, however, replaced later.

Mr Benson Obete, the Gulu District returning officer, said the low turnout could partly be

attributed to the high interest many voters had in presidential and parliamentary voting as opposed to the district chairpersons.

"We understand that many people came from outside the district where they work to vote in the presidential and parliamentary elections. Now that it is over, most of them have gone back. The past election was disturbed by bad weather, but today the weather is clear, we are optimistic people will come in the afternoon," Mr Obete said.

Why the low turnout

The incumbent Gulu LC5 chairperson, Mr Martin Ojara Mapenduzi, blamed the low turnout on the recent 'irregularities' by Electoral Commission (EC) in last week's presidential and parliamentary elections.

"There is a high level of frustration among the people. The voters are few because they were disappointed with what happened and how the EC conducted the poll," Mr Mapenduzi said.

There was a similar low voter turnout for district chairpersons and councilors in Njeru Town Council in Buikwe District.

Daily Monitor visited four polling stations and presiding officers there said voters had not turned out by 11am. None of the 50-page ballot booklet had been used up by the time.

Mr Andrew Bugembe, the presiding officer at Bukaya West Polling Station, said voting materials arrived in time, but the challenge was few voters turning up to cast their votes.

"Since morning, we have not completed one 50-page ballot booklet. I cannot explain why people are not coming to vote. Hopefully, they will come later on," said Mr Bugembe at 11am.

Mr Geoffrey Shaba, presiding officer at Bukaya East A-M Polling Station, also said materials arrived in time but low voter turnout ruined the exercise.

Reported by Julius Ocungi, John Okot, Stephen Okello, Denis Omony & Dan Micheal Komakech & Denis Edema