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Nigeria: Women Defy Rain to Vote in Plateau North By-Election

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Plateau — Women of all ages defied the heavy downpour in Riyom, to vote in the Plateau North senatorial by-election on Saturday.

Women, who came in their numbers, clutched umbrellas with some using polythene bags to cover their heads, as they awaited their turns to cast their votes.

At the many polling units in Riyom Central Primary voting, the women were joined by the elderly persons, who endured the downpour in their determination to vote.

A voter, Tabitha Haruna, said that many women had turned out because they were determined to vote for the right candidate.

"We have the interest and the passion for a good and peaceful society and we believe that the starting point is the election of good leaders," the nursing mother said.

She advised women to vote so as to make their impact felt in governance, and stressed that time had long past when the women sat at home and grumbled silently.

"Women and their children benefit more from good leadership; they are equally the usual victims of bad governance, so we can no more sit aside and allow others to decide our fate," she said.

Another female voter, Mrs Rose Gyang, said that women, as mothers knew the best among the many candidates.

"We know the candidates one by one; we know who is good and who cares about us and we shall demonstrate that with our votes," she declared.

The by-election is to fill the vacancy created by the death, on July 8, of Sen. Gyang Dantong, in a stampede when gunmen attacked mourners at Maseh, a village in the Bachit District of Riyom Local Government.

However some prospective voters in Barkin-Ladi, who were not allowed to vote in the Saturday Plateau North senatorial by-election due to a lack of voters card, have protested the disenfranchisement.

Many of such voters had their names on the register, but claimed to have lost their cards during the decade-long violence that had hit the area.

INEC Presiding Officer, Adamu Shuaibu, in Rahoss Primary School polling unit of Riyom Local Government, where there was a large number of such persons, said he would not allow them to vote because the electoral law had no provision for such excuse.

"Yes, their names were on the list, but that is not enough; they must also produce their cards which were

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issued to them in the first place for the election.

"There are several of them without the cards, but if I accredit them without the cards, I will be contravening the electoral law," he said

Shuaibu's stance led to some protests, but the INEC personnel stood his ground.

At Ban village COCIN Church polling unit, the situation was the same, but A.C.N agent, Gyang Davou, said that the whole process had been devoid of any major distraction.

PDP agents in the same polling unit, Mathew Bot and Victor Labi, decried the denial of the voters' rights to vote over the absence of the card, and urged INEC to always consider the special circumstances of the Plateau.

At Tokan 2b polling unit in Heipang, a voter, Solomon Pam, claimed that 60 per cent of the voters were denied the right to vote because they could not produce their voters' cards.

"Such cards, like many other precious things, were destroyed in the course of the violence," he said.

He wondered why someone, whose picture had appeared on INEC's records, should not be allowed to vote, and stressed the need to be flexible with some of the laws to avoid chaos during other elections.

Another voter, Iliya Pwajok, expressed sadness that he was denied the chance to vote even when his picture and other particulars were on the papers brought by the INEC officials.

"It is not fair at all. INEC should be convinced by our explanations that some of these documents are missing," he said.

APGA agent, Bulus Chioji, as well as his DPP counterpart, Idi Makong, agreed with Pwajok, and called for a revisit of such hard INEC stance against voters who had lost their voting cards in the Plateau violence.

"It is not good to deny so many people the right to vote. We must always have laws that have human faces to avoid some negative reactions by people," Makong said.

(NAN)

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