



Towards Nonviolent Elections in 2019



PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES IN THE NIGER DELTA



Academic Associates PeaceWorks





Towards Nonviolent Elections in 2019

funded by

**Foundation for Partnership
Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)**

conducted by

Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW)



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Introduction

As in the three previous national elections, Academic Associates PeaceWorks undertook a Nonviolent Elections Project, with the primary aim of reducing incidences of election violence in three core states of the Niger Delta (Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers). The Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) funded the 2019 nonviolent elections project which was implemented across twenty-two (22) volatile LGAs in these states.

In **Delta State**, seven local government areas were covered namely:

- Uvwie
- Ndokwa West
- Ughelli South
- Ughelli North
- Warri South
- Warri North
- Warri South West

Four local government areas were covered in **Bayelsa State**:

- Ekeremor
- Southern Ijaw
- Yenagoa
- Brass

In **Rivers State**, eleven local government areas were covered:

- Okrika
- Eleme
- Gokana
- Khana
- Tai
- Asari Toru
- Ahoada East
- Port Harcourt
- Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni
- Emohua
- Obio-Akpor

We used the highly successful Community Stakeholders Network model (CSN) in each local government, in which a 12 person committee meets fortnightly to analyze and take action on potential signs of electoral violence. The CSN includes: representatives of INEC, the police, SSS, traditional ruler, local government official, women, men, religious institutions, mainstream youth and youth at risk. Thus, the CSN can tap every part of the local environment. There are coordinators in each of the Local Governments as well as four state coordinators.

Overview of Activities

The project ran from October 2018 through March, 2019 and carried out the following activities.

- Identification/ training of state and local government coordinators
- Held 264 CSN meetings across 22 LGAs (12 per LG)
- Carried out 354 advocacy visits to critical stakeholders including INEC, security agencies, traditional rulers, religious leaders, cult groups, women groups, schools, churches, etc.
- Sensitization visits to schools, youth groups, churches, motor parks,
- Carried out 110 interventions in actual conflicts across the select LGAs
- Held 22 town hall meetings (1 per LG)
- Conducted 3 roundtables (1 per state)
- Held Niger Delta women meeting etc.

Training of Coordinators

As part of activities in the Nonviolent Elections in 2019, was the identification and recruitment of state and local government coordinators whose responsibilities were to provide guidance to the CSNs in ensuring the smooth implementation of the project activities. In ensuring the coordinators are equipped with the right skills needed to drive the process, a four day intensive training exercise was conducted by AAPW. The training ran from Monday 8-11 October 2018 at the Belleza the Sofia Hotel, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The coordinators were trained in conflict management skills i.e mediation, intervention, escalation and de-escalation of conflict, conflict sensitivity, early warning and early response system among others. The coordinators also gained understanding of

the Community Stakeholders Network, a highly effective platform established by AAPW basically to engage critical stakeholders in the communities in resolving conflict issues. The training also provided the opportunity for the coordinators to interact with other critical bodies such as INEC, security agencies and legal practitioners constitutionally empowered to participate in the conduct of elections. Some high points of the lectures given by INEC and security agencies include; the role of INEC in elections as well as what the body expects from citizens, the role of security personnel in polling unites or voting centers, legal implication for offenders involved in election malpractice ect.



Training of State and Local Government Coordinators



INEC Official (Standing) at the Training of State and Local Government Coordinators

CSN Meetings

Over the years, AAPW had used the CSN model to engage stakeholders drawn from specific sectors of the community and who are critical to resolving conflict issues. The model has proved successful as it encourages stakeholders to take ownership of the process of identifying, analyzing and intervening in conflict issues in their locality. For the Nonviolent elections in 2019, 12 carefully selected individuals including the representatives of INEC, Police, SSS, traditional ruler, local government official, women, men, religious institutions,

mainstream youth and youth at risk, meets fortnightly across 22 LGAs to analyze and take action on potential signs of electoral violence. A total of 264 CSN meetings were held.

The CSNs also engaged with stakeholders through targeted advocacies, interventions and sensitization visits. The project also engaged four state coordinators who were there to guide activities of the committee to ensure the smooth running of activities.



CSN Meeting Southern Ijaw



CSN Inaugural Meeting, Ughelli North LGA



CSN Meeting, Gokana LGA

Advocacy and Sensitization Visits

The CSNs across 22 local government areas, carried out advocacy and sensitization visits to key stakeholders including INEC offices at the state and local government levels, State Police Commands, Divisional Police Command, community heads, schools, cult groups, women groups, motor parks, churches, mosques among others. The aim of the visits was to sensitize stakeholders on the

nonviolent elections process as well as to secure stakeholders buy-in in supporting AAPW peace initiatives for the elections in 2019. The sensitization and advocacy visits were effective as they helped in creating awareness of the project and also provided the opportunity for massive stakeholders participation.



At the Palace of HRM, Dr. Wilson Ojakovo (Oharisi the III)
The Ovie of Ughelli Kingdom



Advocacy Visit to the Divisional Police HQ, Koko,
Warri North LGA



Advocacy Visit to King Alfred Diete Spiiff Twon Brass LGA



Advocacy Visit to Iwere Secondary School, Ndokwa LGA



Obio Akpor CSN on NVE Advocacy to PFM



Obio Akpor CSN on NVE Advocacy to
Rumuekini Central Mosque



Sensitization on Radio Station, Yenagoa



Advocacy Visit to the Divisional Police HQ, Ughelli South

Interventions

Some of the more interesting interventions included work with cult groups and other youth at risk in Ekpan, Ughelli, Ekeremor and Port Harcourt, to encourage them to not give their lives for any politician. Following the violent presidential elections in Abonnema, the Kalabari king called a peace meeting of people from across the

kingdom to sue for peace. The CSN in Brass held numerous peace marches and involved the King of Twon Brass, HRM King Alfred Diete Spiff in a peace accord.

Inter-communal conflicts were also resolved in Ughelli North and South as well as in Ndokwa West.



Intervention Meeting with Youths, Port Harcourt City



Road Show in Okirika LGA



Intervention Meeting with Youths,
Asari-Toru LGA



Intervention Meeting, Orogun, Ughelli North LGA



Intervention Meeting Eleme LGA



Intervention Meeting with youth at Ekeremor



Intervention Meeting with Islamic Group,
Warri South LGA



Intervention Meeting with Political Parties, Uvwie LGA



Advocacy at Ogba/Egbema/Ndomi LGA

■ Town Hall Meetings

Town hall meetings held in the 22 local government areas with over 150 participants in each local government. Participants were carefully selected to discuss the issues that may lead to violence before, during and after the 2019 general elections.

The town hall meetings created a platform for stakeholders to raise issues as well interact with the INEC in addressing the concerns of citizens as it relates to the general elections. Citizens also expressed their concerns with regards to the role of security agencies in the electoral process, saying that the body language of the INEC and security personnels e.g the police, is capable of creating tension which could result in violence. Participants also stress the

need for traditional and religious leaders to do the needful by being neutral in issues that relate to politics. They also condemn in strong terms, the use of youths by politicians to perpetrate violence during electioneering periods.

Interestingly, participants agreed that there is need to end election violence in the states of the Niger Delta and resolved to contribute to peaceful 2019 general elections in their local communities through supporting peace processes.

The umpire (INEC) security agencies, traditional and religious leaders, youths and political party executives promised to toll the path of neutrality and allow for credible, free and fair elections.



Town Hall Meeting, Koko, Warri North LGA



Participants at The Town Hall Meeting, Uvwie LGA



Town Hall Meeting, Twon Brass LGA



Town Hall Meeting, Yenagoa LGA



Town Hall Meeting, Khana LGA



Town Hall Meeting, Southern Ijaw



Town Hall Meeting, Warri South West LGA

State Roundtables

AAPW in the Nonviolent election project, conducted state roundtables in the three select states (Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta) with representatives of INEC, Police, SSS, women, youths, political parties, traditional rulers, religious leaders, civil society actors, media, PIND, in attendance. The roundtables availed stakeholders the opportunity to interact on the ills of election violence as well as chart the way forward.

Participants called on INEC and the police in particular, to discharge their duties as constitutionally stated, while also urging women to take necessary steps in ensuring

that their children are kept away from causing mayhem during and after the elections.

In some local government areas i.e Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Ndokwa East, participants identified some communal disputes that if not addressed, could lead to violence during the elections, while pleading with AAPW for immediate interventions.

Meanwhile, INEC and security agencies present, assured citizens of a credible process, while saying that INEC and the police will synergize efforts in ensuring the security of voters as well as electoral materials during the elections.



Roundtable, Delta State



Roundtable, Rivers State



Roundtable, Bayelsa State

■ Raising Women's Voices



Participants at the Niger Delta Women Meeting

Following the daring action (sit ins) taken by women of Okrika, Ogu/bolo, and Odenwari, in protecting election materials from being hijacked by the military, AAPW facilitated a one day meeting titled Mobilizing and Raising Women's Voices against Election Violence. 100 concerned women drawn from Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta states participated in the meeting to analyze lessons learned from action taken by Okrika, Ogu/bolo women as well as to tease out the roles women can play to reduce election violence and also forestall reprisal attacks in the post-election period. The

women condemned in strongest terms the killings in Abonnema, Khana, Emohua, and other parts of Rivers State during the 2019 General Elections and the subsequent hijacking of materials by politicians guarded by men in military gears which has created tension and insecurity in the state. The women identified and commended the role the women of Ogu/Bolo, Okrika and Abonnema in Rivers State, and Odenwari in Bayelsa State played in preventing election violence and resisting the hijacking of materials in their respective local government areas.



Dr. Dave Udoia, Chief Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni, HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu with Ann Kio Briggs (Standing)



Hon. Barr. Christie presenting the Communique at the Niger Delta Women Meeting



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A communique reached at the end of a 1-day roundtable meeting for Niger Delta Women on election violence held at Pearl Hall, The Atrium Event Centre, Stadium Road, Port Harcourt on Thursday, March 21, 2019




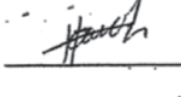




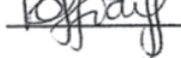
Elections in the Niger Delta have been fraught with high level of violence. The situation was not different during the 2019 election process which had the worst cases of violence resulting in killings, intimidation, and further militarization of the region. Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Akwa-Ibom states were most affected by incidences of electoral violence. The quest for political power, underpinned by the need for control and appropriation of resources of the region for mainly personal gain/ interest has contributed to making election a do or die affair.

Based on the foregoing, 100 concerned women drawn from Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta states met at a 1-day roundtable meeting to tease out the roles women can play to reduce election violence and also forestall reprisal attacks in the post election period. The women condemned in strongest terms the killings in Abonnema, Khana, Emohua, and other parts of Rivers State during the 2019 General Election and the subsequent hijacking of materials by politicians guarded by men in military gears which has created tension and insecurity in the state. The women identified and commended the role the women of Ogu/Bolo, Okrika and Abonnema in Rivers State, and Odenwari in Bayelsa State played in preventing election violence and resisting the hijacking of materials in their respective local government areas

The meeting came up with the following recommendations:

1. Mobilize and organize women across political and ethnic divide to form alliances and build capacity for preventing electoral and other forms of violence in communities of the Niger Delta
2. Set up a committee of women under the leadership of HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu and AA PeaceWorks, to strategically engage traditional rulers and political leaders in all the states to put an end to violence in the Niger Delta region
3. There should be an immediate ceasefire on all politically motivated violence, hate speeches, inciting statements, and sponsorship of violence in the region. Anyone contravening this ceasefire will be named and shamed by Niger Delta women
4. A panel of enquiry should be immediately setup by both Federal Government and the International community to identify and prosecute the sponsors and perpetrators of violence during the 2019 elections in the Niger Delta, more especially the role of the military during the elections
5. Government and stakeholders should take steps to carry out disarmament, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reintegration of youths and those that have been affected by violence during the elections
6. Build the capacity of women to fully

- understand their civic and constitutional rights to enable them speak up against violence and intimidation
7. Women should be bold to seek for offices in political parties and governments at all levels and also be engaged in decision making machineries of government
 8. Communities of the Niger Delta should stop celebrating people known for violence, rather those that have contributed positively to the development of the region should be identified and celebrated
 9. There should be a medium and long term plan for stopping violence against women
 10. AA PeaceWorks and other organizations should organize regular fora for bringing women together to share experiences and re-strategize for peace and development in the Niger Delta

HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu	<i>Omu of Anioma Kingdom</i>		21/03/19
Lolo Hailsham	<i>Bonny Kingdom, Rivers State</i>		21 March 2019
Sophia Daniel-Sonime	<i>Kalabari, Rivers State</i>		21/03/19
Caroline Siasia	<i>Odenwari, Bayelsa State</i>		21/03/19
Barr. Christiana Tamunobereton-ari	<i>Ogu/Bolo, Rivers State</i>		21/03/19
Helen Sira Nkpankpan	<i>Ogoni, Rivers State</i>		21/03/19
Ibiwari Iyama	<i>Okrika, Rivers State</i>		21/03/2019
Loretta Ahuokpeme	<i>Civil Society</i>		21/3/19
Barr. Deborah Effiong	<i>Civil Society</i>		21/3/2019

Conclusion

Towards Nonviolent Elections in 2019, Funded by PIND, Conducted by AA PeaceWorks project was very successful in many ways. It directly involved hundreds of people in protecting their electoral process, through participation in the Community Stakeholders Networks. It also directly involved thousands of other people in the advocacy visits, town hall meetings, and state roundtables. Thousands more were active on our social media platforms Shunwahala.

Perhaps the most direct impact was felt through the numerous interventions which the team conducted over the six months of the project. Direct impact was witnessed when scores of cult members or other youth at risk declined to be used as political thugs for the elections. Our strong advocacy efforts, along with a certain fatigue of being used and dumped by politicians, meant that fewer young men allowed themselves to be involved in election violence. This reduced involvement of youth in election violence was seen in Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, Ughelli North, and Ekpan.

Our interventions also helped to resolve or minimize other conflicts such as interparty violence in Uvwie and Eleme, intercommunal conflicts that flare up during times of stress, such as Ughelli South and Ughelli North.

While the work that we did helped to reduce election violence by citizens, we could not anticipate the high level of election related violence perpetrated by the security agencies. This was especially high in Rivers State, particularly during the gubernatorial election. In planning ahead for future election work, we must engage more with the security agencies and with the politicians who direct them. The women of Ogu/Bolo and Okrika demonstrated spontaneous forms of nonviolent resistance, and these stories can be shared. If more women become empowered to use such techniques, they can be a good counterbalance to the use of military force, with the citizens protecting their electoral and governance processes in a nonviolent, nonthreatening way.





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