Preventing 2015 Election Violence in the Niger Delta

Highlights from the IPDU Non-Violent Election Project

In the run-up to the 2015 Nigeria general and state elections, the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) deployed the Integrated Peace and Development Unit (IPDU) in three states to undertake a holistic portfolio of interrelated activities for early warning, assessment, prevention, and management of violent conflict. The three components consisted of the following:

- IPDU worked with Community Life Project (CLP) to develop an SMS platform for conflict early warning in which over 2,000 messages were received and analyzed.

- IPDU contracted AA Peaceworks, to implement their Community Stakeholder Network (CSN) approach to conflict management, which had proved highly successful in the 2007, 2011, and 2012 elections. Committees were trained in 18 LGAs and successfully mitigated over three hundred cases of elevated conflict risk. AA Peaceworks amplified those efforts with an extensive peace messaging campaign through the media and town halls.

- Data from both components (CSNs and SMS) were triangulated against data on the Peace Map for cross-validation and analysis.

All three components intersected with the Partners for Peace Network (P4P), so that post-election, a review of the best practices and lessons learned would inform the design of a scaling up of this integrated model across all 9 Niger Delta states.

Peace Messaging

Showing the human cost of election violence: as part of the project's media messaging videos portrayed interviews with widows and their families to deter participation in election violence.

Source: Still from ShunWahala campaign video by AAPW project.shunwahala.org/campaign-videos/

Non-Violent Election Project Target States and LGAs

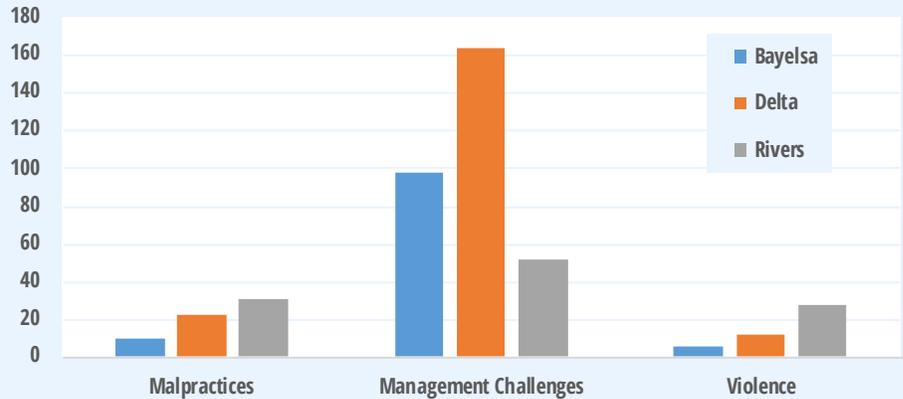| Delta	Bayelsa	Rivers
Ughelli North	Nembe	Part Harcourt
Warri South	Ekeremor	Okrika
Warri SouthWest	Brass	Degema
Uvwie	Southern Ijaw	Gokana
Sapele	Sagbama	Obio/Akpor
Udu	Kolokuma/ Opokuma	Asari-Toru

FFP

PIND NDPI

Peacebuilding in the Niger Delta

Elections in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region are high stakes affairs, often characterized by violence and vote rigging. Electoral violence matters, not only because of its impact on democracy and governance, but also because it hurts economic and human development. Economically disadvantaged persons, especially youths without reliable sources of livelihoods, are often used by politicians to perpetrate violence during elections. In addition, the negative impact of election-related violence goes beyond the electoral cycle and lingers on even after the elections are concluded, thereby impeding the democratic process and economic development.

PIND seeks to establish innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships and promote platforms where actors and stakeholders can collaborate on peace building efforts to ensure peaceable livelihoods and economic development in the Niger Delta. The IPDU was established by PIND to promote collaboration and synergy among stakeholders in the public and private sectors for conflict early warning and response in the Niger Delta. The IPDU non-violence project is a special intervention to prevent the occurrence of election-related violence in the region.
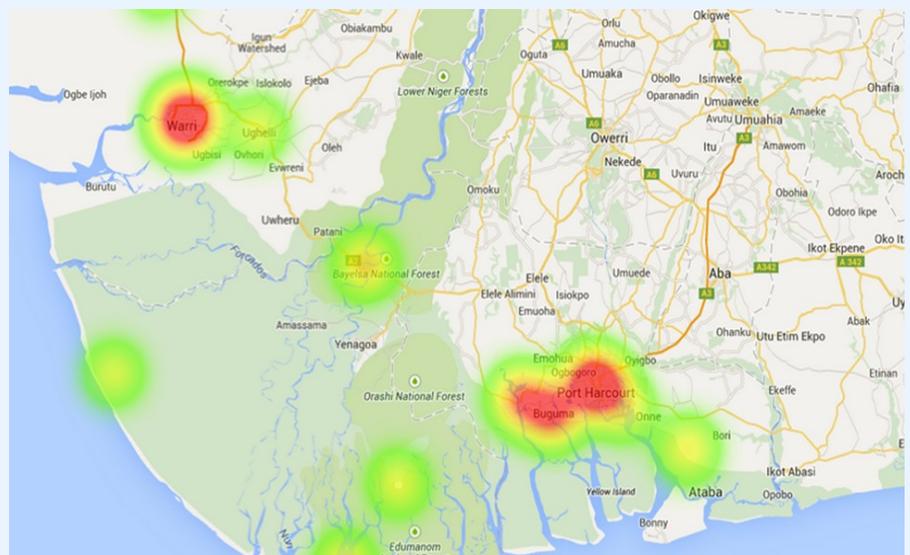
Elections at the national, state and local levels in the Niger Delta are often accompanied by complex conflict dynamics. Elections are seen as opportunities to influence the distribution of public wealth and to access large clienteles of political patronage, creating incentives for intra- and inter-party violence. Early in the process (before or after party primaries), those with a stake in the results may attempt to intimidate, abduct, or kill aspirants in order to influence which candidates ultimately run for office. Once candidates have been selected, violence may be used to intimidate voters and election officials during campaigns, registration, and polling. In some cases, violence can break out upon

Election Conflict Early Warning Messages by State

SMS messaging was used as a tool for conflict early warning. During the 10-week election project, 74% of the conflict early warning messages reported election management challenges. These included late arrival of INEC officials and voting materials, late accreditation and postponement of elections. There were also reports of late arrival and absence of security personnel during elections. The majority of the management challenges were reported in Delta state, during the April 25 rerun elections.

Heat Map Distribution of Incidents Reported by CSNs

The graphic above is a Heat Map (screenshot) of incidents reported by the CSNs during the project — www.p4p-nigerdelta.org.

the announcement of the results if partisan polarization is very high and one group feels aggrieved by the outcome. Communal and criminal violence can also be exacerbated during the election cycle, as criminal elements may be employed as political thugs or long-standing communal conflicts may be inflamed.

2015 Non-Violent Election Project Approaches

The IPDU nonviolent election project was designed to sensitize the electorate ahead of the 2015 general elections, handle problems arising during the elections, and address post-election violence and discontent in the selected LGAs.

The project took three key approaches:

1. AA Peaceworks facilitated a group of stakeholders (CSNs) for real-time conflict early warning and prevention.

2. The general population was sensitized about the importance of non-violent elections through media messaging, town halls and an SMS pilot project.

3. Data from the SMS and CSNs were integrated with the Peace Map for analysis of patterns and trends and to produce bulletins to inform the preventative approaches of key stakeholders.

1. Early Warning and Prevention
   Real-time conflict mitigation

Running from 15 January 2015 to 31 March 2015, three State and 36 LGA coordinators were identified and trained to help facilitate

the Community Stakeholders Networks (CSNs). CSNs were then constituted in each of the selected 18 LGAs across the three States, and 270 CSN members were trained and deployed to identify and respond to risk factors.

With an emphasis on gender and diversity, CSN membership was recruited from a range of traditional leaders, INEC officials, Security Officers, CSO members, women's groups, Youths-at-Risk (ex-militants), youth groups, the clergy, opinion leaders and community leaders.   These CSNs were trained and deployed to handle conflict during the 2015 general elections, and address post-election violence and discontent in their respective communities.

For actionable early warning, data on conflict issues collected by the CSNs was integrated into IPDU's wider early warning system, which includes the P4P Peace Map and the IPDU SMS early warning platform. Juxtaposing these different sources for cross-validation and triangulation allowed for an organization and visualization of data to identify hotspots and risk factors as they were emerging on the ground.

At the end of the ten weeks of the project, a total of 445 incidents, including 198 election

The 10-Week Project saw:

180 CSN meetings held

270 CSN members trained

303 Cases with elevated conflict risk mitigated

489 Interventions embarked upon

2,017 Early warning SMS sent

4,944 New social media followers

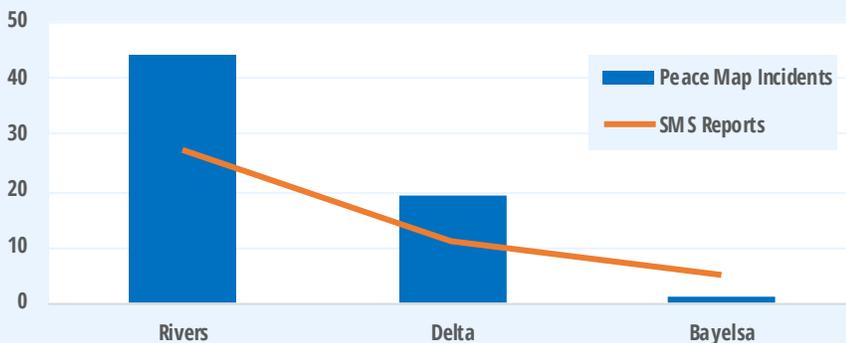**55** Town Hall meeting attendees

-related, 191 non-political, and 56 oil-related violent incidents, were identified through the CSN Early Warning System and integrated onto the Peace Map platform.

2. Peace Messaging
   Media Sensitization

AA Peaceworks conducted an extensive advocacy and sensitization program, including media messaging using radio broadcasts, TV documentaries, drama and social media. Central to this was tagline "ShunWahala." "Wahala" translates to disturbance or trouble, therefore urging Nigerians to shun violence. The media campaign involved the broadcast of video vignettes that documented the agonies experienced by families of victims of election-related violence. Interviews were mainly conducted with women, to allow them to share their experiences of losing husbands, fathers or sons. This approach

Most reported violence during March 14-April 24 2015

Based on a cross-validation of Peacemap and SMS report data, Rivers had highest levels of violence reported, followed by Delta and Bayelsa states. The CSN data from the IPDU early warning and response pilot which ran ten weeks prior (from January 19-March 29) also showed the same rankings for the three target states. This cross-validation methodology provides an opportunity for early warning of conflict, using the SMS tool as a means for real-time situational awareness and response .

provided an effective message about participation in election violence not being worth the eventual cost to the perpetrators and their families.

The radio component of the peace messaging included a weekly fast-paced half-hour program, also entitled "ShunWahala" that provided factual information on elections, a drama series, discussions, and question and answer sections. There were eight different radio dramas produced, and they aired a total of 24 times over the ten week period. Three social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter and ShunWahala blog) were used to convey nonviolent election messages to the public, especially the youth.

The ShunWahala blog was created by AAPW as a social media platform for constructively engaging and sensitizing Nigerian citizens to shun violence before, during and after the 2015 general elections. The project gained

4,944 social media followers over the ten week period.

SMS Pilot Tool

A GSM-based online platform, with the capacity to receive text messages and make voice calls from multiple phone lines, was developed for the IPDU by the Community Life Project (CLP). The primary database of the platform was populated by the registered mobile numbers of 85 trained community volunteers from selected LGAs in the target States. Trained volunteers observed the 2015 general elections in the target States and sent conflict early warning messages to a dedicated SMS hub.

The project involved members of the P4P Network and was a pilot project following the recommendations from a 2013 workshop held with the Centre for Communication Programs-Nigeria

identifying SMS as an effective tool for mobilization, conflict early warning, and peace messaging in the Niger Delta context.

Between March 24 and April 14, a total of 2,017 messages, including 1,116 from 25 LGAs in the 3 target states and 909 from LGAs outside the target states, were sent to the SMS platform. Out of the 2,017 messages, 919 election conflict early warning messages including 582 during the March 28, 303 during the April 11, and 34 during the April 25 rerun elections, were extracted for further analysis.
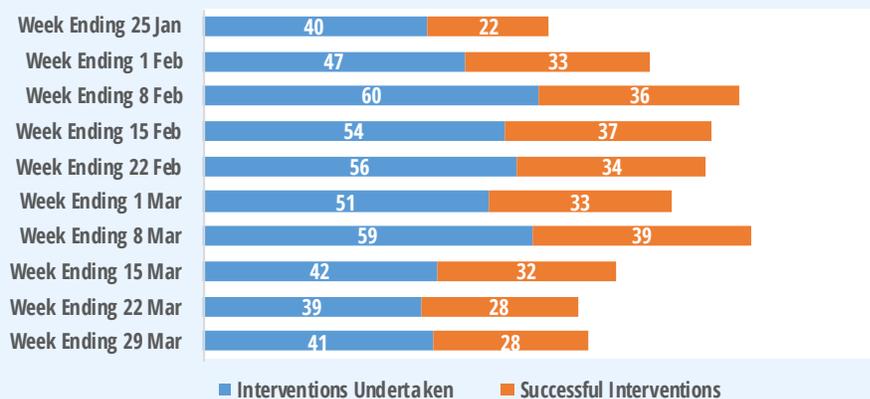
When SMS data was compared with CSN and Peace Map Data, it became clear that this platform has high utility for situational awareness and early warning, provided each data set is triangulated correctly. All sources confirmed that among the three target states, Rivers was the most conflict prone, followed by Delta, then Bayelsa.

Examples of Project Success Stories

Quantitatively, violence in the 18 target LGAs was higher than in the previous election cycle, but lower than what many people feared might be the case, considering the political dynamics of the 2015 election cycle. Qualitatively, there are many examples of conflicts that were managed effectively through the intervention of the IPDU project partners.

The broad composition of the CSN and AAPW's network, which includes INEC and security agencies, as well as the intensive media campaign, enabled the team to take steps in curtailing or preventing election violence in the target states and LGAs where activities were carried out.

Weekly Distribution of CSN Interventions

Week	Interventions Undertaken	Successful Interventions
Week Ending 25 Jan	40	22
Week Ending 1 Feb	47	33
Week Ending 8 Feb	60	36
Week Ending 15 Feb	54	37
Week Ending 22 Feb	56	34
Week Ending 1 Mar	51	33
Week Ending 8 Mar	59	39
Week Ending 15 Mar	42	32
Week Ending 22 Mar	39	28
Week Ending 29 Mar	41	28

■ Interventions Undertaken ■ Successful Interventions

Interventions undertaken by the CSNs were largely in the form of peace advocacy, direct mediation and facilitation of peaceful resolution of conflicts. A total of 489 interventions were undertaken by CSN members in the selected LGAs. Out of these interventions, 303 were successfully implemented, resulting in the prevention of violence in the communities. Other examples of interventions include mediation and prevention of clashes between politicians, ex-militant leaders, and youth groups . As well as facilitating peaceful settlement of inter-communal conflict and inter-party clashes, and direct advocacy to groups promoting non-violence.

Case Studies on Mitigating Youth Violence in Niger Delta States

The Peace and Security working group, of which PIND and FFP are both on the steering committee, engaged local stakeholders in 17 states to develop participatory state-level election violence scenarios in preparation for the election. These scenarios were presented in Abuja and Washington, D.C. to experts, practitioners, and decision makers to mobilize the national and international community. Data from the Peace Map was included in these scenarios. Drawing on findings from the CSNs as well as Peace Map, IPDU also produced bi-weekly election violence updates. Thus this portfolio of election-related activities served as a catalyst for collaboration and information sharing from the local level to the national and international levels.

Delta State

CSNs twice intervened to de-escalate the situation when youths attempted to invade the Anglican Cathedral as Gubernatorial candidates staged meetings with the Bishop.

Then, seeking to address the recurring issues, the CSN members met with the Bishop of the Anglican Cathedral who invited the Gubernatorial candidates to address the youths and listen to their grievances. The leaders of the youth group were then invited to town hall meetings where they were briefed about the importance of constructive dialogue in conflict resolution and urged to shun violence during the elections.

Bayelsa State

The CSNs identified that in the previous general elections held in 2011, many of the electorate in a particular community were not able to vote because there were not enough polling units.

Conscious that the problem might degenerate into violent confrontation between the community and INEC officials, the CSN members in the LGA wrote an official letter to INEC requesting the creation of an additional voting centre within the community. Ultimately, an additional voting centre was approved.

Other CSN interventions in Bayelsa addressed logistical issues in the distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), helping to increase the collection rate and reduce problems relating to illegal PVC collection in several wards.

Rivers State

A faction of a cult group reportedly hid a cache of arms including assault rifles and packs of dynamites in a mangrove swamp. When people discovered them, they were removed. On finding that their arms had been stolen, the leadership of the faction planned to carry out random attacks against other cult groups and factions they suspected to have carted away their arms.

CSN members were informed about the planned attacks and arranged for an advocacy visit, during which the CSN team appealed to the leadership of the cult group to settle their grievances through dialogue. In response, the leader of the cult group thanked the CSN members for taking the risk to visit them in such a dangerous location to advocate for peace and suspended the planned attacks. The cycle of violence that could have resulted from a series of reprisal attacks was thereby averted.

Looking Ahead

Integration and Up-scaling

Any success that this pilot project achieved is attributable to the experience and leadership of the project partners and the integration with PIND's wider peace-building strategy which seeks to identify existing peace agents and augment their efforts through the facilitation of platforms, data, skills, and resources. This included P4P Network members, CSN members, AA Peaceworks, CLP, FFP, and others, including the efforts of the Peace and Security Working Group, to identify election violence scenarios by state, and the tracking of data by state, LGA, indicator, and sub-indicator on the Peace Map. These activities influenced where IPDU should put its efforts and what issues needed to be addressed in the training and mitigation for a non-violent election.

This non-violent election project is now being integrated and scaled up through the P4P structure for conflict early warning and preventative response beyond the election and across all nine Niger Delta states.
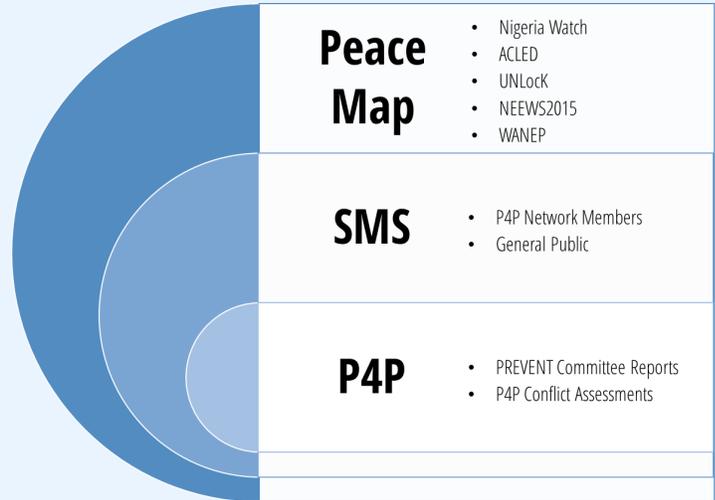
The pieces are all in place. The P4P Network has grown to over 3,000 people. In addition to serving as a vehicle for the collection of local knowledge for early warning, they serve as the system's primary vehicle for preventative response. Each chapter has a action plan by which to address the root drivers of conflict. Each chapter also has a PREVENT Committee which is based on AA Peaceworks' CSN Model, focused on rapid response to urgent risks. Early warning data includes the Peace Map for integration and visualization of conflict data from a wide variety of sources (including Nigeria Watch, ACLED, WANEP, NSRP Sources, FFP's UNLocK, CSS/ETH Zurich, NEEWS2015, and others). The SMS platform is in place for real-time early warning.

Having compared SMS data with CSN data and with Peace Map Data, it is clear that this platform has high utility for situational

IPDU Early Warning System

IPDU:
- Research (Bulletins, Memos, Alerts);
- Consulting/ Coaching for Effective Response

Peace Map
- Nigeria Watch
- ACLED
- UNLocK
- NEEWS2015
- WANEP

SMS
- P4P Network Members
- General Public

P4P
- PREVENT Committee Reports
- P4P Conflict Assessments

The IPDU takes an integrated approach to early warning, which takes a preventative stance, rather than an interventionist one, and decentralizes the response.

FFP is committed to promoting sustainable human security around the world, and is PIND's international Coordinating Partner on Partners for Peace (P4P), an initiative supported by NDPI. FFP has been working with local civil society in Nigeria to develop the UNLocK network since 2010.

PIND's vision is sustainable peace and economic development in the Niger Delta. PIND seeks establish multi-stakeholder partnerships that support programs which empower communities to achieve an environment for equitable economic growth in the Niger Delta.

Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW), an NGO with a successful track record of peace building and conflict management in the Niger Delta, was contracted by PIND via IPDU to implement peace building and election-related conflict mitigation programmes.

awareness and early warning, provided each data set is used for its respective strengths and triangulated against the others to account for their respective weaknesses.

IPDU serves as a hotline for the P4P Chapters and their PREVENT Committees for conflict analysis and early warning, as well as technical support for effective preventative response. Beyond the P4P Network, to include the Peace and Security Working Group, the general public, and

other stakeholders in the public and private sectors, IPDU also produces analysis to improve conflict sensitivity and peace-building more broadly.

This integrated approach to early warning, which takes a preventative stance rather than an interventionist one, and decentralizes the response, has shown promise in the 2015 elections. PIND, in partnership with The Fund for Peace, will be building on this model for management of conflict in the Niger Delta going forward.