



A PRESS STATEMENT BY KIMPACT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (KDI), THE PROJECT COORDINATING HUB FOR NIGERIA ELECTION VIOLENCE REPORT (NEVR) IN BAYELSA STATE ON THE 16TH NOVEMBER 2019 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

**Distinguished Men of the Press
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning,**

With great pleasure, we welcome you to this press conference organized by Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) in respect of the Nigeria Election Violence Report (NEVR) for 2019 Bayelsa State Governorship Election held on the 16th November 2019. The objective of this press conference is to inform the general public and major stakeholders on the key findings and observations of Kimpact on election violence report during the Saturday, November 16, 2019 Governorship election in Bayelsa State and to give recommendations based on KDI/NEVR Situation Room analysis.

ABOUT NEVR PROJECT

The Nigeria Election Violence Report (NEVR) is a project coordinated by Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) in Bayelsa State with the support of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The project focuses on developing the capacity of civil society to monitor, analyze and respond to incidents of election-related conflict before, during and after elections in Nigeria. It encourages collaboration and dialogue between election stakeholders in society to mitigate and/or prevent election violence.

To achieve these objectives, KDI assessed the electoral risk factors in the eight (8) local governments of Bayelsa State ahead of the 2019 gubernatorial election with a view to explore non-violence expectations of the election, examine real and potential security threats in the zone so as to identify early warning signals that could assist

relevant stakeholders, especially INEC, security agencies and civil society organisations (CSOs) to deploy appropriate responses.

From the survey, 51.77% of the respondents foresaw a peaceful governorship election while 48.23% expected electoral violence. The possibility of violence was unlikely in Kolokuma/Opokuma local government while Sagbama, Yenagoa and Ogbia were projected to somewhat experience electoral violence. However, the remaining four (4) local governments: Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw, Nembe, and Brass had a high tendency of experiencing violence. Also, from the analysis, party thuggery, vote buying and cultists' clash topped the list of risk factors which could spark electoral violence. Furthermore, KDI and her trained monitors started tracking electoral violence related incidences and peace initiatives on the 23rd September 2019. For the pre-election period, up until Friday, 15th November 2019; KDI tracked, reported and documented forty-two (42) Peace Initiatives, twenty-three (23) Civic Education and Nineteen (19) Violence Incidences.

With the aforementioned indicators and statistics, KDI trained and deployed 16 monitors throughout the eight (8) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Bayelsa state for the Pre-election, Election Day and for the Post-election days. Several peace initiatives such as advocacy visits and town hall meetings were held at different locations and LGAs in Bayelsa State to discuss with key stakeholders so as to mitigate political tensions that may lead to electoral violence. Over 532 pledge cards were circulated and the commitment of the citizens to peacefully participate in the elections were gotten. 9 billboards bearing nonviolence messaging were mounted across the 3 senatorial districts of Bayelsa State. A toll-free line (08000010000) was made available as a medium where the public can also report any incident of violence in their communities.

KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS OF KIMPACT ON INCIDENCE OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE, POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE AND OTHER RELATED ELECTIONS HITCHES.

As part of efforts to deepen democratic processes, a Kimpact/NEVR Bayelsa Election Situation Room was setup for credible, real-time analyses for objective insights into incidence of election violence, document same and to provide rapid response to emergencies – especially in the crisis situation during and after the elections.

Firstly, commendation goes to the patriotic Nigerians in Bayelsa State who were committed and showed persistent determination to exercise their franchise on Saturday 16th November 2019 going against all odds. Kimpact cannot but salute the members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) who were resilient and unflinching in carrying out their duty despite the difficulties posed on their path. We express our sympathy for those (voters, election officers, security officers, observers, civil society members and the media) affected by the Pre-election Day and Election Day violence.

On Saturday, 16th November, 2019, Kimpact NEVR Bayelsa Election Situation Room received reports from the 8 LGAs of Bayelsa State ranging from Violence (Death, Intimidation of Voters, Carting away and destruction of election materials most especially ballot papers, Disruption by Political Thugs and Kidnapping) to Potential Violence (Late Commencement, Vote Buying, and Security Conduct).

COMMENCEMENT OF ELECTIONS

Reports gotten showed that there was late commencement of polls in most polling units (PUs) across Bayelsa State. Delay in the opening of polls was obvious in Ward 5 in Yenagoa, distribution of election materials from Registration Area Centre (RAC) did not start till 11 am, this led to a protest where protesters who were mostly women were chanting “No Election in Ward 5”. In Ogbia LGA, Ward 2 election materials left the RAC at 9.22am. Most PUs in Sagabma did not commence polls until 10am. In Nembe LGA, distribution of election materials from RACs were not concluded until 9.20am. It is important to state that INEC Guidelines provided for polling to continue until all the voters on queue voted. But, it is also significant to state that the time lag in the starting time of voting will always affect the timely completion of the collation process.

LOGISTIC ARRANGEMENT FOR THE ELECTIONS

There were few reports that caused anxiety on deployment, and adequacy of election materials. Reports of unavailability of results sheets in the sensitive materials deployed to Southern Ijaw Constituency 1, Ward 5, Otua Community led to political party faithful protesting and insisting on the availability of the result sheet before the commencement of polls. Reports of inadequacy of transportation for adhoc officers going to the creeks were also gotten. Many civil society organizations raised

alarm on preparation as regards the flooded areas but many of these areas were left unattended to.

INDUCEMENT AND VOTE BUYING

The dominant nature and widespread vote buying, and inducement looks like a menace that has no regards for all antidotes. This is really disturbing as reports gotten were mostly that vote buying was done with impunity in Ogbia and Southern Ijaw LGAs. Agents of political parties were distributing money ranging from N2000 to N3000. This act was carried out in the open unperturbed.

The expectations of Nigerians were that lessons learned from the 2019 general elections would have a positive impact on the Bayelsa elections. However, there were still issues surrounding logistics, early commencement of polls, and vote buying.

All the aforementioned issues were potentials for violence in the Saturday, 16th November 2019. Getting reports on violence and disruption of the voting process by political thugs is very disheartening.

With sorrow of heart, Kimpact confirmed that five (5) Nigerians died in Bayelsa State as a result of pre-election violence in Nembe LGA and two (2) persons in Yenagoa during the course of electoral violence on Saturday 16th November 2019 in Bayelsa State. KDI has repeatedly stated that no ambition of any politician is worth the life of any Nigerian and we strongly condemn the lack of empathy, care and sensitivity by the political class regarding these cases.

On Saturday, 16th November election in Yenagoa, Ekeremor and Southern Ijaw LGAs of Bayelsa State was branded with report of ballot box snatching and destruction, voter intimidation, and abuse of the electoral process. In Opolo Town Hall, Epie II Ozyi Polling Unit in Yenagoa LGA, a report was received of a domestic observer that was beaten, one person was cut with sharp objects and many others scrambled for safety. In Okunu Townhall in Yenagoa, party agents disrupted voting process.

Political party thugs also disrupted the voting process in Ekeki and Gwegwe communities in Yenagoa LGA. Reports received from Ward 8 in Ekeremor LGA depicts that election took place in 3 PUs out of the 36 PUs in the ward. There were reports received from the NEVR field monitors that some of the election materials for the ward was hijacked by suspected political thugs.

In Kulama, Ward 17 of Southern Ijaw LGA, KDI received clips of the RAC that was attacked and election materials including ballot papers were destroyed due to group clash of political party loyalists. In Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri Communities of Nembe LGA, reports were received of voter intimidation that dominated the communities, where voters were not allowed to vote for candidate of their choices. In some polling units, police personnel who were unarmed were overwhelmed by political parties, thugs and supporters. These security personnel, as was the case in most instances, did not receive back up from roving security personnel as planned. There were also reports of armed security personnel carting away election materials and even destroying them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to various degrees of concerns around logistics, vote buying and issues that hinged on electoral violence on Saturday's election in Bayelsa State, Kimpact recorded issues that are significant and that communication between INEC and security agencies need to improve in elections. In view of the aforementioned issues, KDI recommends that:

- The cases of violence in our electoral process is disturbing. KDI asks for the swift prosecution of electoral offenders and recommends that the Federal Government consider setting up an Electoral Offence Commission or special electoral court to prosecute and punish electoral offenders as INEC presently is being overwhelmed with other aspects of election administration and management.
- Actions should be taken to mitigate logistical issues in elections as this played out in the 2019 General election and also in the 2019 Bayelsa Governorship elections.
- KDI encourages INEC to look into engaging Logistics Companies that can distribute sensitive voting materials and equipment to every part of the country professionally and promptly instead of the NURTW that has overtime being a tool even in the hands of the political class.
- Communication strategy between INEC and Security agencies should be strategic and security agencies should ensure that credible security assessment is done, so as to ensure in subsequent elections that considerations are given to places that are volatile or prone to violence.

- INEC should investigate the high reports of materials being carted away and destroyed in some wards and LGAs.
- There should be more voter education and sensitization for the citizens.

Call to Action.

KDI hereby request that:

As citizens of this beloved country Nigeria, voters as a major stakeholder should bear in mind that no development is possible in the atmosphere void of peace. We implore voters to please avoid being an instrument to foment violence in any area as peace for one is peace for all.

The major factor that threatened the election was the impunity from the suspected staunch followers of the political class. KDI requests the political class to join their efforts with that of other major stakeholders to curb incidences of electoral violence. They should ensure their followers are not used as instrument to perpetrate violence henceforth, and bear in mind that there is no blood of any Nigerian that is worth their political ambitions. Also, the political class should submit themselves to obeying the guidelines of electoral process as this will aid good and peaceful conduct in elections

KDI also requests that the security agencies should probe more into the cases of partiality displayed by some of their members, also for subsequent elections they should be impartial, fair and ensure justice in the discharge of their roles.

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