

**UDF-NIR-17-748: Support for Elections in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

**Date: 19 August 2021**

The evaluator would like to thank all the staff of Stakeholder Democracy Network for their insights and support that enabled this process to take place despite logistical hurdles posed by COVID-19. Ayibakuro Matthew

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## I.

This report offers an evaluation of the UNDEF-funded project, 'Support for Elections in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria' implemented by Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) and supported by the Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organization Forum (BANGOF) as an implementing partner. The project was implemented from 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2020 at a total cost of US\$198,000. It aimed to address elements of both the supply and demand side of good governance to support election processes in Bayelsa state with the overall objective of improving elections in the Niger Delta region.

The **key findings** is that the project has largely been able to achieve these goals through partnering with the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) to support the improved capacity of polling staff and efforts to engage with relevant stakeholders, improving the knowledge of police tasked with maintaining election security and through engagement with communities in the targeted local government areas (LGAs). The project was able to show how most beneficiaries have an improved understanding of key election issues that can reduce instances of malpractice. Despite challenges in implementing some elements of the project, the project contributed to the overall improvement in conduct during the 2019 Bayelsa state poll.

The focus on Bayelsa was **well targeted** and enabled SDN to draw on its own work and connections in the Niger Delta region around elections in the design of the project. The decision to devote a significant component of the project to supporting INEC was also well targeted given that it is both in charge of overseeing the elections, but also plays a key role in coordinating other key actors – such as the security agencies and political parties – and makes efforts to engage voters. Combining the more technical aspects of election management of the project with an effort to engage voters in three specifically selected LGAs, supported by BANGOF, ensured a balance of both election actors and election participants benefitted from the project.

The **challenges** of the project did encounter some challenges that stemmed from a lack of prior consultation with INEC that could have better aligned priorities. A couple of the activities planned for the second outcome were either not delivered, or not delivered as envisaged, which did limit the ability of the project to deliver the outcome of "increased INEC capacity to reduce possible interference in the 2019 Bayelsa election, and future elections, by unregistered political party agents". But the bulk of the activities were delivered effectively and SDN did well to ensure that gender commitments made in the project document translated into practice across the trainings and community engagements. Knowledge acquired through the training and community town halls was also clearly captured, but the project could have done more to measure how that knowledge was applied in practice by observing, or asking existing observer groups, to monitor specific conduct on election day.

The project excelled in building partnerships with INEC officials, security agencies, political parties and other civil society groups supporting the election process that enhanced the impact of the intervention. Flexible project management aided this process as it allowed for alterations to be made to the initial design that still enabled the project to achieve its targeted objectives within the budget provided. The expenditure represented good value for money.

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The \_\_\_\_\_ of the project contributed to better conduct on election day, though more precise efforts to measure how it did so were missing. A more comprehensive overview of election day activity was a missing element of this project in both its design and implementation that would have complemented the measurement of increased knowledge through anecdotal evidence and radio listenership. But the project's impact was not just limited to election day, with INEC staff highlighting how the training materials and pamphlets produced for the 2019 poll have been used in subsequent by-elections and election planning in the state.

\_\_\_\_\_ for an event-focused project is always a challenge but in utilizing a training-of-trainers approach to their engagement with INEC and the security agencies, SDN demonstrated a commitment to embed learnings in these institutions. However, this relies on these institutions having the budget and structures to roll-



support to have an impact, it cannot simply focus on creating better informed citizens. It also must aim to engage key election stakeholders so that the process they participate in reflects the ballots cast.

This project looked to address elements of both the supply and demand side of good governance to support election processes in Bayelsa state. On the supply side the grantee, Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), aimed to build the capacity of INEC staff, and ad-hoc staff, on polling day oversight using a training-of-trainers approach and to support and encourage closer collaboration between INEC and the security agencies, primarily the police, through training and dialogues.

Working with an implementing partner – the Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (BANGOF) – in three of the state's eight LGAs, and in nine communities in each LGA, SDNs designed intervention also targeted the demand side of the good governance equation. This was done through targeted voter education, town-hall discussions, a radio programme that discussed key election issues and a social media campaign, encouraging voters to protect their vote and the right to choose. Drawing on an analysis of the previous Bayelsa gubernatorial election, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Ogbia were selected as target LGAs where political violence was perceived to be high-risk ahead of the 2019 vote. According to the 2015 Niger Delta Watch election observation

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Engage and train security agents, primarily the police, on polling day conduct and adherence to Mandate Protection Guidelines.





	2.2.2: Print party agent cards	
2.3: 300 political party agents trained on their rights and responsibilities on polling day	2.3.1: 10 training sessions each comprising 30 agents to be held.	Workshop report Attendance sheet to measure gender balance achieved
2.4: One engagement meeting between INEC and political parties in each of the LGAs targeted to discuss the issue on unregistered party agents	2.4.1: Meeting held in each LGA	Meeting report Media coverage of the event
2.5: Sensitisation for police command and other security agencies to discuss the issue on unregistered party agents	2.5.1: Meeting held in each target LGA	Meeting report Media coverage of the event
3.1: 1,350 voters – covering key communities in each of the targeted LGAs – received education on voting processes and procedures.	3.1.1: Review and update Nigeria Mandate Protection Guide 3.1.2: Print 1,350 copies of updated Nigeria Mandate Protection Guide 3.1.3: 27 trainings sessions each with 50 participants	Workshop reports Survey of 300 voters, reflecting on the 2019 election process as compared to 2015
3.2: State-wide public campaign (aiming to reach 170,000 voters) on voting rights, mandate protection and election violence prevention	3.2.1: Design and print 20,000 copies of INEC voter materials. 3.2.2: Hold 27 public engagement forum in targeted LGAs. 3.2.3: Organize one live town hall radio debate for 80 persons. 3.2.4: Undertake a six-month social media campaign to raise voter awareness further	Report from discussions had at/during live town hall. Media coverage of offline and online campaign

Combining the different elements found in the project document, it is possible to reconstruct the project's implicit Theory of Change . In short, it argued that improved capacity to hold election processes in Bayelsa state, improves election management and encourages more voters to participate in the process, which ultimately creates more credible elections that can generate more accountable leaders.

### III.

In light of the ongoing travel restrictions in place to limit the spread of Covid-19, the evaluation employed a hybrid approach. The lead evaluator (Jamie Hitchen) undertook desk-based research and was supported by an in-country evaluator (Matthew Ayibakuro) with extensive experience of working in the Niger Delta region, who led the key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) in Bayelsa state. The two-member research team then discussed the interview findings and used these, along with the detailed review of the desk-based materials, to draft the final evaluation report. A similar hybrid approach has previously been used for a UNDEF evaluation of a project in Uganda in 2020<sup>5</sup>.

The evaluation was undertaken using a participatory and people-centered approach, where the project beneficiaries were the main protagonists targeted in the data collection process. Where possible, respondents were also encouraged to participate in the elaboration of lessons learned and recommendations of the evaluation. The same set of semi-structured questions, tailored to specific respondents, was used as a guide for all interviews.

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reflect a gender mainstreaming approach. But whilst questions about gender were raised with each respondent, the bulk of key informant interviewees were male.

## **IV.**

Overall, all project stakeholders agreed that the intervention was timely and made efforts to address key election challenges that have previously derailed voting processes not just in Bayelsa state, but in the Niger Delta region, and even Nigeria, as a whole. Off-cycle elections in Nigeria have provided the election commission with an opportunity to

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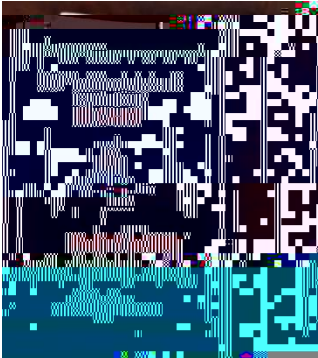




However, there were some challenges in delivering the outputs related to the second outcome, particularly when it came to the creation of the database of political party agents and in holding LGA level dialogues between INEC and political party officials. In both cases the main obstacle was posed by INEC. For the LGA dialogues, INEC lacked the available time to participate. Whilst it was acknowledged that INEC and political parties engaged in other fora in the run-up to the election, SDN staff did admit that the specific focus on political party agents – and the challenge posed by fake agents – which was to be the focus of these LGA dialogues, may not have been raised at other events.

The Commission was not supportive of the political party agent database and as a result this output of the project was not achieved. It had concerns about the technology involved, noting that it would be needed to regularly be updated to reflect the ever-changing list of party agents that parties share with INEC. They also had concerns about the privacy of the information that was to be collected and its potential misuse. However, the political parties themselves seemed more open to participating in the database, with an official from the APC noting that, “the database would have been useful to addressing the issue of interference by unverified party agents”. SDN admitted that this had an impact as, “we wanted to use the database to track perpetrators of electoral violence and electoral fraud”.

The printing of 300 political party agent ID cards was delivered as envisaged, but it alone was unlikely to achieve the outcome of reduced electoral interference by political party agents. The database would have been a key additional tool for supporting post-election accountability and mapping where incidents of violence or malpractice did take place and could have been an innovative element with application in other states. Community members spoken to for this research regarded political actors as the key enablers of violence and conduits for vote buying on election day.



These examples illustrate the challenge of working closely with an institution like INEC, as this project did, which has many demands on its time during an election period. As one INEC official noted, “these engagements should start very early... starting from the headquarters so that that relationship is built so that the commission staff will not see it as a distraction if SDN comes and say they need this information”. But he noted that, “SDN wanted to add value to the process and the commission wanted SDN to be part of the process, so there were reasons that made the relationship work” and that “it was overall very fruitful”. Whilst the partnership undoubtedly ensured that the project had a more sustained and significant impact, the priorities, and schedules of SDN and INEC were not always the same and in instances such as the database of party agents, the project’s outputs and outcomes were affected as a result.

The project could also have done more to document the reach and engagement with its social media campaigns and training of social media influencers. Whilst reporting about this element highlighted the significance of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook for engaging with some







The impact of the project in terms of improving the knowledge of training participants was clear and well documented using the pre- and post-training surveys. A post-election representative survey of 300 voters found that almost 50% of respondents felt they were better informed about election day processes after the SDN intervention. For training participants, the use of pre- and post-training assessments offered a measure of what they had learned, with 83% of INEC officials who participated in the training

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## V.

SDN was able to build on its connections in the state to establish a good working relationship with key stakeholders in the election space.

The project was timely and well targeted, both in terms of the LGAs focused on and the issues it aimed to address.

Working with INEC enhanced impact and improved sustainability elements of the project, particularly through the training-of-trainers approach.

The training-of-trainers approach is limited if the institution being trained lacks the ability to institutionalize the knowledge acquired or where there is insufficient funding for the internal trainings to take place.

Given the plethora of local languages in Bayelsa state, using English, and pidgin English specifically, was the best way of ensuring as wide as community engagement as possible in a cost-effective way.

Whilst the project had clearly thought through the need to demonstrate the fact that beneficiaries acquired knowledge from the project, an effort to capture how this knowledge was applied on election day was a missing element that could have further strengthened the ability of the project to demonstrate impact.

Training that was interactive and provided significant amounts of practical examples of

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Seek to take the lessons learned from this project and apply them, when undertaking future initiatives targeting state-level elections in the Niger Delta region.

In addition to delivering training-of-trainers modules on the content, consider adding some sessions to improve the skills and capacity of internal trainers to deliver the type of interactive trainings that participants appear to be more engaged with.

## VI.

Training-of-trainers approaches are most effective when either the institution has a culture of internal learning, or where additional financial support is provided to support the internal roll-out.

There is an important distinction between a better understanding of an issue and a change in behaviour as a result. Just because a voter knows that vote buying is illegal, for example, does not mean they will refrain from doing it.

Frequent and regular dialogue with key institutional partners ensures that activities, outputs and outcomes of the project are achieved. This can include pre-project, or start of project, collaborative planning sessions.

Adaptive project management and implementation allows for adjustments to be made that enhance the achievement of the overall goal of the project.

Radio remains a key medium for reaching out to, and engaging with, communities in the state in a cost-effective way.

Ensuring that an election focused project starts significantly before polling day can make it easier to implement (as there will be less pressure on the time of key election stakeholders) and can allow for pre-election elements, such as primaries and campaigns, to be targeted.

Direct project beneficiaries valued the coordinating role provided by the grantee, who

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How did SDN maintain good working relationships with the implementing partner and with key project stakeholders (police, INEC, political party agents)? And what were some of the challenges experienced?

Did the sizeable outlay on travel and venue hire costs offer value-for-money?

How much of an issue was the availability of INEC staff and officials to participate in the project and did this have a noticeable impact on the projects ability to deliver activities on time with tangible benefits?

How were the many reports generated by the project, documenting its activities and meetings, learnt from and used to shape and inform its ongoing implementation?

Why was the training of trainer's model used and with what success?

What efforts were made to achieve the gender-balance targets set in the project document? And how successfully were these achieved?

What do you see as the biggest achievement of the project?

Did you use the knowledge acquired when casting your ballot/when overseeing the conduct of the polls during the 2019 election?

How do you plan on sharing the knowledge you have acquired on the issue in the future with others?

Have you experienced any negative impacts from the project?

How have INEC staff/police officials/party agents who attended trainings and workshops institutionalized the knowledge gathered and applied the learning in practice?

What impact did the failure to create the political party agent database and to hold the INEC meetings with political parties at the targeted LGAs have on the project?

Establishing partnerships and working relationships with a wide array of stakeholders was key to project implementation. How are these relationships being sustained? And with what outcomes (potential or actual)? (Prompt here to ask a little more about the multi-stakeholder platform that was designed to continue after the project).

How is the knowledge that was transferred to INEC/security agencies under this project, going to be applied in future state elections?

Was the project's overall impact altered in anyway by the fact that the courts subsequently reversed the outcome of the election that was initially handed down by INEC?

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Stakeholder Network for Democracy	Joseph Ekong, Michael Ogbuigwe, Oparah Zephaniah, Florence Kayemba, Joseph Ekiye, Samuel Agboola	7 June 2021 – Port Harcourt
Independent National Election Commission	Robinson Kuroghobogha, Assistant State Training Officer and Samuel Ekiye, State Training Department Office	8 June 2021 – Yenagoa
Independent National Election Commission	David Okenezo, Prince Erasmus, Sogo Tonyo Clinton and Omiete Priscilla (staff trained by project)	8 June 2021 – Yenagoa
Nigeria Police Force – Bayelsa State command	Alexander Awini Tunubu, Deputy Superintendent	9 June 2021 - Yenagoa
Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organizations Forum	Keme Opia, Project coordinator	9 June 2021 - Yenagoa
Inter Party Advisory Council	Eneyi Zidougha, State chairman	9 June 2021 - Yenagoa