



POST PROJECT EVALUATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND



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

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the other institutions referred to in the report.

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Project Area

Bayelsa state is one of nine states in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.



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I. Overall Assessment

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 **overall assessment** 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 **relevant** 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 **effectiveness** 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 **efficiency** 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.

The **impacts** 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.

Sustainability 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-out the training internally, otherwise the training materials will exist but not been used effectively. More could also have been done to try and maintain the positive working relationships that the project established through the creation of a working group for advancing improved elections in the state.

In conclusion, the project provided a strong framework and built partnerships that supported the improvement and understanding of election conduct at both the institutional and voter level. Efforts to try and ensure sustainability were embedded in the design and whilst surveys were used to measure the knowledge acquired, measuring how that knowledge was applied in practice would be one key **recommendation** for improving this intervention. Others include engaging key partner organizations in the design of the project, expanding the focus beyond election day, to include pre-election events such as a campaign rallies and political party primaries, and to further improve sustainability by creating a space for the continuation of discussions about how to improve the election environment in the state in the periods between polls.

The evaluation also highlights some important **lessons learned** during the implementation that can be used to strengthen similar interventions focused on state-level elections in Nigeria. These include; that adaptive project management and implementation allows for adjustments to be made that enhanced the overall goal of a project when working with key institutions; that there is an important distinction between a better understanding of an issue and a change in behaviour as a result; and that training of trainer 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.

II. Project Context

i. Development Context

Bayelsa's governorship election – Nigeria is a federal republic comprised of 36 states and a federal capital territory – was held in November 2019. It is one of seven states in Nigeria that holds 'off cycle' elections, because of previous election disputes that had to be settled in extended court proceedings. Given that it was the first "off-cycle" election to follow the 2019 general elections, held across February and March 2019, it provided an opportunity for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to applying learnings from that process in a highly contested state-level election.

The management of elections by INEC in the last decade has shown signs of gradual improvement. In 2015, INEC oversaw Nigeria's first democratic transition between presidents from different political parties since the return to democracy from military rule in 1999. Nonetheless general elections in Nigeria remain undermined by "severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems and low turnout"¹ according to the European Union's Election Observation Mission in 2019. A last-minute delay to polling in 2019, saw Nigeria record its lowest turnout figures since its return to democracy in 1999² These problems are equally acute in Nigeria's oil producing Niger Delta region given the ongoing presence of non-state armed actors and the proliferation of small arms.

In addition to these factors, the 2019 Bayelsa election was viewed as being a highly contested election with the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party viewed as a viable challenge to the incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate³. The fluid and unstable political climate created tension among critical stakeholders, and this was deepened by the outcomes of the primary elections conducted by the two major political parties which led to high-profile defections, the impeachment of the speaker of the state's legislature, and several alleged politically induced kidnappings and killings. In 2015 the Bayelsa state election was declared inconclusive by INEC after polling was suspended in one of the eight local government areas (LGAs). Only after a re-run of voting in Southern Ijaw LGA was a victor declared.

This context illustrates the prevailing challenges of voter engagement, management and overall electoral security in Bayelsa. Voter frustration at possible politically manipulated processes is only likely to enhance the feelings of disenfranchisement and voter apathy⁴. But for election

¹ European Union Election Observation Mission to Nigeria. 2019. "Press release: Final report and recommendations for electoral reform". 15 June. Available at https://eeas.europa.eu/election-observation-missions/eom-nigeria-2019/64167/press-release-eu-election-observation-mission-nigeria-publishes-final-report-2019-general_en

² International Centre for Investigative Reporting. 2019. "Nigeria has the lowest rate of voter turnout rate in Africa". <https://www.icirnigeria.org/2019-election-nigeria-has-the-lowest-voter-turnout-in-africa/>

³ Centre for Democracy and Development. 2019. "The Godson turned Godfather: Governor Dickson and Bayelsa's 2019 election". Available at <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/godson-turned-godfather-governor-dickson-and-bayelsas-2019-election/>

⁴ Akinyemi, S. 2019. "Voter apathy: A threat to democracy in Nigeria". Democracy in Africa. 24 April. Available at <http://democracyin africa.org/voter-apaty-threat-democracy-nigeria/>

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.

ii. Project objectives and approach

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 report 23 electoral malpractices were tracked in Southern Ijaw, 15 in Ogbia, and 10 in Sagbama. Consideration was also given to what was logistically feasible given the topography of the state and ongoing security concerns. Engagement with key stakeholders primarily took place in Yenagoa, the state capital.

The three key outcomes of the project, which aimed to contribute to the project’s overall objective of improved elections in the state, were:

1. Increased INEC capacity to identify and respond to electoral malpractice.
2. Increased INEC capacity to reduce possible interference in the 2019 Bayelsa election, and future elections, by unregistered political party agents.
3. Increased voter knowledge of electoral procedures, with increased voter participation and reduced possible malpractice in the 2019 Bayelsa election.

To achieve these outcomes SDN and its implementing partner BANGOF, proposed a range of activities (*for a full outline of the interventions proposed see Figure 1*) which included:

- Engage with key INEC officials to develop a training guide on polling day management for temporary INEC staff.
- Train INEC staff using a ‘training of trainers’ approach, so they can support workshops with ad-hoc staff on polling day procedures and political party agents on polling day conduct.
- Facilitate discussions and engagements between key stakeholders in targeted LGAs and INEC staff.

- Engage and train security agents, primarily the police, on polling day conduct and adherence to Mandate Protection Guidelines.
- Host an end of project feedback workshop for key stakeholders and produce a lessons learned and best practices report from those discussions.
- Run a public awareness campaign on voter’s rights and obligations in the three targeted LGAs.

In total the project aimed to train 40 INEC staff on poll observation roles and responsibilities. Using a training of trainers approach it was envisioned that 600 ad-hoc INEC staff – hired for the election period – would benefit from this knowledge. Training was also to be provided to members of the Bayelsa State Police Command and their respective LGA divisions to improve the security of the polls and be better equipped to keep track of political party agents. Voter outreach aimed to directly impact 1,350 voters across the three targeted LGAs, with the proposed media and social media campaign expected to indirectly impact 170,000 voters across all eight of the state’s LGAs. Across all these interventions SDN was committed to working towards an equal split between male and female beneficiaries.

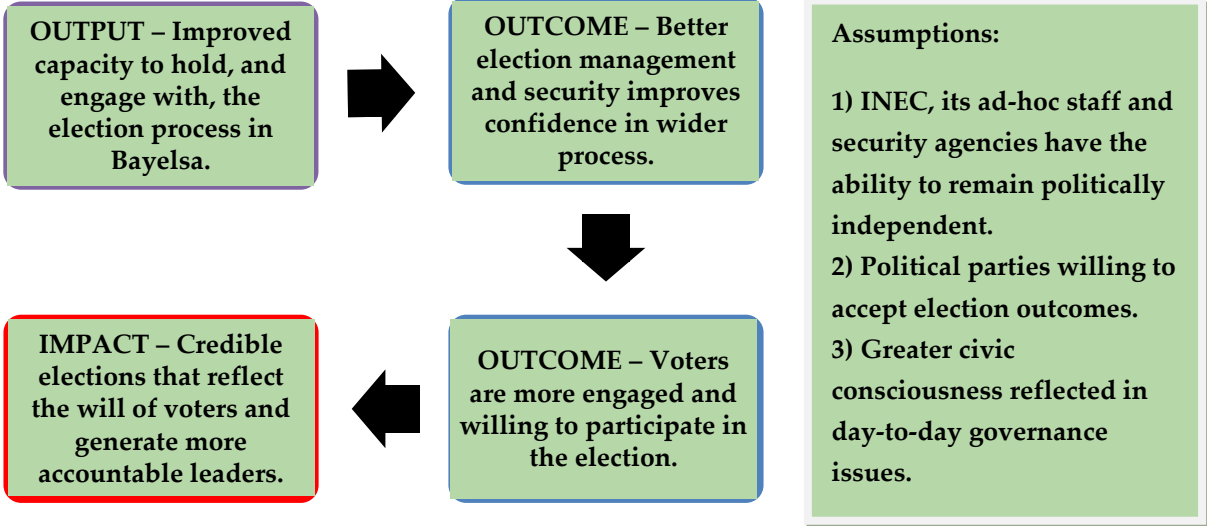
Figure 1: Logical Framework

Outcome 1: Increased INEC capacity to identify and respond to electoral malpractice		
Output	Activities	Means of verification
1.1: 30 INEC permanent staff members identified and trained to build capacity of temporary staff.	1.1.1: Train INEC staff 1.1.2: Develop polling day training curriculum. 1.1.3: Print 600 polling day manuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of trained staff reporting improved knowledge • Polling day manual
1.2: 600 ad-hoc INEC staff trained on polling day procedures and identification and reporting of election day fraud	1.2.1: 15 workshops held across targeted LGAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop report(s) • Attendance sheet to measure gender balance achieved. • % of trained staff reporting improved knowledge
1.3: Produce lessons learned and best practice report to further inform INECs work in future Nigerian elections	1.3.1: Hold workshop with key stakeholders. 1.3.2: Write report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report disseminated to INEC and other key actors working on elections
Outcome 2: Increased INEC capacity to reduce possible interference in the 2020 Bayelsa and future elections by unregistered political party agents		
Output	Activities	Means of verification
2.1: 10 INEC staff identified and trained to deliver sensitization sessions on rights and responsibilities on polling day for 300 political party agents from major political parties in the target LGAs	2.1.1: Training of trainer’s workshop for identified INEC officials. 2.1.2: INEC staff deliver training to 300 political party agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training/workshop reports and attendance sheets
2.2: 300 political party agent ID cards printed and disseminated in the three target LGAs	2.2.1: Provide technical support to INEC to create an electronic database of political party agents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of party agents’ cards in use on election day

	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting report • Media coverage of the event
Outcome 3: Increased vote knowledge of electoral procedures, with increased voter participation and reduced possible malpractice in the 2020 Bayelsa election		
Output	Activities	Means of verification
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (*see Figure 2*). 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.

Figure 2: Implicit Theory of Change



III. Evaluation Approach

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 2020⁵.

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. These drew on the set of standard evaluation questions outlined in the UNDEF Operation Manual to capture key issues around relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability and were supplemented by specific, project-related questions, devised after reading the pertinent material for the preliminary desk review (**see Annex 1 for the list questions**). A similar set of guiding questions was used to shape the focus group discussion with community members of Ogbia LGA. Where individuals wished to speak about sensitive issues their anonymity was protected. The evaluators also aimed to

⁵ Hitchen, J & Muhereza, S. 2020. “UDF-UGA-15-648: Empowering female and youth domestic workers in Uganda”. United Nations Democracy Fund. Available at <https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/uganda-udf-15-648-uga-evaluation-report.pdf>

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

IV. Evaluation Findings

Relevance

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 test out new approaches and offer an opportunity to focus in on election processes at a state level, without the distraction of concurrent general elections. The recent history of gubernatorial polls in Bayelsa, which have been affected by violence and alleged malpractice, provided clear focus areas for the project to address.

SDN's decision to support the work of INEC as a significant part of the project, was well targeted given that it is both in charge of overseeing the elections, but also plays a lead role in coordinating other key actors – such as the security agencies and political parties – and makes efforts to engage voters. SDN identified areas of focus for the engagement based on previous election reports as, “a lack of capacity of permanent and ad hoc staff with election day processes, and even the use of card readers”. The reports also highlighted how staff felt that previous trainings had been rushed and as a result most times they did not adhere to the content of INEC's institutional training materials in the field. INEC officials appreciated the opportunity to partner with SDN, noting that “civil society organisations can be a key enabler of the commission's work” to make it more inclusive of non-government actors. However, they would have preferred if the project had started earlier, as in the run-up to the election process the demands on the institutions time become most pressing and this limited their ability to fully engage in some instances.

Closer collaboration at the design stage with INEC officials could have further enhanced the partnership. Whilst it is understandable that engaging INEC before securing funding would have been difficult, building in a component of collaborative project design at the start of the project would have further aligned the two organizations' priorities. There was some element of collaboration as one INEC official explained how “SDN developed the documents and sent them to us and we also looked at them and made some inputs here”, but they were not directly involved in the wider project design process. Had they been, this could have given space to mitigate some of the challenges that saw key elements of outcome two – which focused on better documenting political party agents - not implemented, and changes to some of the training roll-out plans, based on INEC staff's limited availability and their interest in expanding the coverage of the project to cover staff from all eight LGAs in the state. Some degree of prior engagement may also have avoided the initial reluctance shown towards the project by the Resident Electoral Commissioner of the state, who was only willing to be part of the project once he was encouraged to do so by the INEC central office in Abuja. This, after targeted advocacy from SDN.

Combining the more technical aspects of election management of the project, with an effort to engage voters in three specifically selected LGAs, ensured a balance of both election actors and election participants benefitted from the project. Even if some actors felt more emphasis and funds could have been allocated towards voter-focused initiatives, which received less than 10% of the overall budget. SDN also acknowledged that given the violent incidents that characterised the pre-election period - the primary processes and the campaigns - in places like Nembe LGA, including pre-election events in trainings for the police, in particular, and in the materials for educating citizens, would be something to consider for future initiatives and could have further enhanced the security of the wider election process beyond election day.

Overall, SDN were seen as a credible interlocutor, with their capacity, connections and experience working in the state recognised by all those interviewed for this evaluation. Including BANGOF as the implementing partner only enhanced that credibility at the local level, given the organization's experience coordinating civil society work and engaging with grassroots communities in the state. The selection of the three LGAs to be targeted made sense in terms of their recent history of violent electoral incidents as well as what was logistically feasible. The fact that efforts were made to ensure that each one represented a different senatorial district, helped the project ensure a further degree of balance. The decision to undertake community engagement components of the project in English or Pidgin English was also the most appropriate choice. Bayelsa has a huge amount of linguistic diversity and translating the radio programmes or sensitisation initiatives into the many local languages would have been expensive and not necessarily have added significantly to the project. As the BANGOF representative noted.

“At the radio level, doing it in the native language will be cumbersome because our lingua franca here is English by reason of the multiplicity of our languages and dialects. Because if you are broadcasting in one dialect, you are cutting off the other many dialects from the program except you are going to broadcast the program in all dialects which is almost impossible.”

Effectiveness

The approach to evaluating effectiveness has two elements. One is to assess the implementation of the project outputs and outcomes. The second component is to ask how effective those outcomes were in delivering the project's overall objective.

For the most part the project was able to achieve the outputs envisaged under outcomes one and three of the project document. Trainings reached the numbers of INEC staff and ad-hoc staff, police representatives and political party agents envisaged and there was a strong commitment to the gender equality commitments made by SDN by the institutions sending individuals to be trained. SDN staff also stressed that the project “tried not to fix activities on days that will hinder women or inconvenience women from coming out to participate”. Under the third outcome, which focused on improved community understanding and awareness, whilst there was a concerted effort by SDN and BANGOF to ensure gender balance, there was recognition from the implementing partner and some female community members, that prevailing cultural attitudes to women's engagement in politics made this challenging. Nonetheless for the most part, in both the trainings and the outreach work, the project did well in meeting its stated gender targets.

This was not so clearly the case when it came to the selection of training participants or community level individuals. Although SDN provided a basic set of criteria to institutions like INEC about the experience and qualifications of individuals to be sent to the training of trainers workshop for example – this included staff with at least four years’ experience of training other staff; staff that had attended previous trainings; and those that would be able to demonstrate knowledge gained – INEC staff interviewed for this evaluation admitted that they “picked the officials randomly – there was no serious criteria, except that there was reference to gender considerations and that staff chosen had good prior experience of training”. SDN did undertake some verification of the lists provided by INEC but did not propose changes as a result.

For those who attended, the quality of the training provided was widely commended. Training participants were particularly keen to stress that the interactive approach that the SDN hired consultant deployed – which used a lot of role play games to illustrate practical examples – was useful in helping them to understand how to use the card reader for example. For INEC staff this was a welcome change from the in-house trainings they were used to which were predominantly delivered as lectures with limited interaction. One INEC staff member recounted how they used this new knowledge on election day:

“With the knowledge I gained through the training, I was able to display to them before the election on how to move from one point to the other, how to place your hand on the card reader and how to thumb print on the ballot paper.”

A member of INEC’s training unit staff also stressed that the pamphlet which accompanied the training was very useful, “it is like a summary of our [INEC] training manual, so I tend to use it ever since [including during the senatorial elections in the state in December 2020]”. A police representative spoken to for this evaluation, echoed the views of INEC officials, stating his belief that the trainings also benefited from “the CSO perspective, in particular how to manage relationships with voters in a way that reduced the risk of violence”.



Training of security agents. Photo Credit: @SDNNigerDelta

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.



Example of political party agent ID card

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

voters in the state, using software to measure the reach of posts and the level of engagement created by them and the trained influencers would have further illustrated how their specific messages were able to penetrate online during the election period.

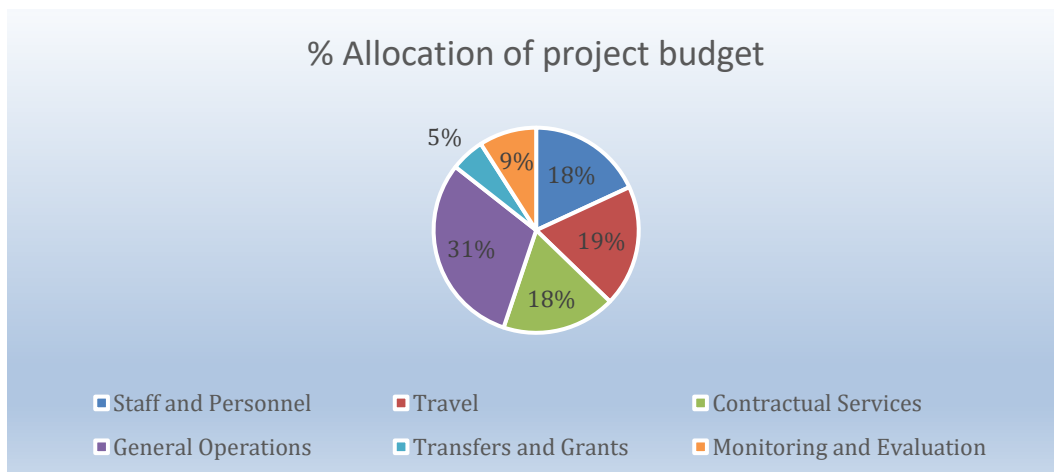
Overall, there was a clear and logical progression from the outputs to the expected outcomes in the design of the project. But a shortcoming of the project was not capturing in a more rigorous way how these learnings were applied on election day itself. Several evaluation respondents felt that the project could have better measured its impact by including some element of election observation, or by collaborating more closely with civil society organizations (CSOs) who were already engaged in election observation to make it more cost-effective.

By asking a partner CSO to include a question or two in their observation that assessed one or two elements of INEC ad-hoc staff, police or party agents conduct, the project would have been able to provide more conclusive evidence that not only did training recipients demonstrate improved knowledge, but that they applied this knowledge on election day. Whilst INEC staff and voters in Ogbia LGA engaged with for this evaluation spoke of using their new knowledge in the election period, the project could have better documented these examples to show impact, in addition to the collection of election day evidence. This data would have been particularly insightful given that some concerns were raised about many ad-hoc INEC staff being susceptible to being replaced on the eve of an election by informal agreements struck between local INEC officials and political party activists and members.

Efficiency

This evaluation explored three aspects of the project's efficiency; value for money, project management and the synergies and partnerships it was able to build.

Overall, the project offered a good level of value for money. 19% of the budget was spent on travel for both SDN staff and training participants. However, SDN staff noted this was required to ensure good levels of participation by key stakeholder staff in the trainings, which were a core part of the project. They further noted that even with this allocation some ad-hoc INEC staff who travelled from more remote LGAs felt that the allowances provided by the training were insufficient. Almost a quarter of the budget was spent on running the core activities (captured as part of general costs in the graph below) but just 5% of the budget was allocated to the implementing partner to run the public awareness campaigns, even though these were targeted at over a quarter of the direct beneficiaries. However, it should be noted that this did not inhibit the delivery of the targeted outputs and outcomes.

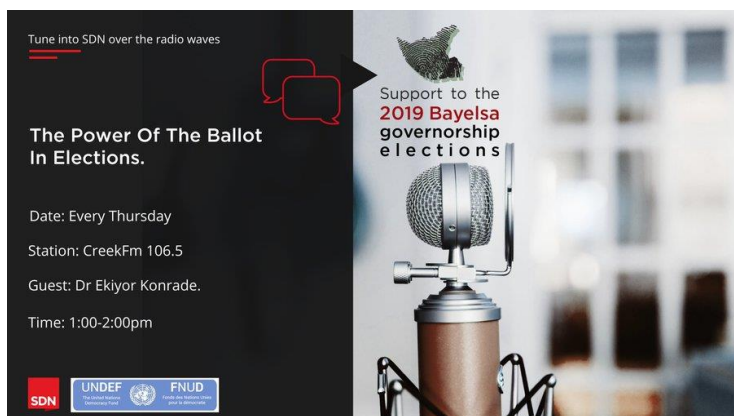


One suggestion for further improving the value for money component was for SDN to spend as much of the project money as possible as locally as possible, to further support the communities in which it worked. Although snacks and drinks for community outreach activities were purchased in the state capital Yenagoa, BANGOF staff were keen to encourage SDN to explore ways in which these products could be bought from local businesses within the LGAs, where feasible to do so.

SDN demonstrated strong project management skills throughout the project. They showed a willingness and ability to adapt the activities whilst maintaining budget discipline and the capacity to deliver on project outputs and outcomes despite tight timeframes, and towards the end of the project, challenges associated with the growing issue of the Covid-19 pandemic.

SDN also excelled in building strong partnerships with key project stakeholders. In the case of security agencies, SDN was able to draw on, and strengthen, previous interactions. Working closely with BANGOF ensured not only that the project was able to engage grassroots communities, but that the project synergized well with the activities of other CSOs working on the elections in the state, given that it is the umbrella organization for more than 40 non-governmental bodies in the state. However, these synergies could have been better utilized by the project to undertake a cost-effective component of election day monitoring. This would have been useful not just for SDNs ability to demonstrate impact, but it would have elicited information that could have been shared with INEC and the police to help them identify the gaps where future training should be targeted.

In building partnerships, SDN also dedicated time to engage key figures involved in community focused initiatives. The anchor of the Creek FM radio shows supported by the intervention, noted how SDN invited key station staff “to brainstorm [with SDN] in the course of the programme – this was very helpful in evaluating outcomes on the programme and making improvements”. This example illustrates how the project management SDN provided not only enhanced their own process, but that of their partners and implementers. Even though there was no formal mechanism established by the project to sustain the partnerships and synergies built, relationships have been maintained informally with key representatives working to enhance election processes in the state.



Flyer for Creek FM show discussing the 2019 elections. Photo credit @SDNNigerDelta

Impact

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-of-trainers session demonstrating improved knowledge. One FGD participant shared their own experience of how, “INEC officials did very well in terms of how they respond to you when you approach them in the polling unit, unlike other elections that they were not well prepared even with their work, so I saw improvement in them in this election”. But being able to show, beyond through anecdotal stories, that these learnings were applied on election day would have further enhanced the ability of the project to show more clearly how this project contributed to what was regarded as a more credible gubernatorial vote in 2019, than in 2015.

A FGD held in Ogbia LGA reiterated the findings of the projects post-election survey that attendees at the town hall events or those who had listened or read materials produced as part of the project had an improved understanding of election day process and their rights. Respondents admitted that they now understood they were entitled to stay and watch the counting process, that it was their right to be allowed to vote after the polls officially close, providing they are in the queue beforehand and how to report incidents of violence they observe. They also commented on how they spread the knowledge acquired with friends and family members in their local communities:

“I shared the knowledge with others. I posted some of the flyers that were given to me around my place of work and people saw them and started asking questions, so I enlightened them about the voting process and the need to protect and not to sell their votes and I also told them to pass the message to their family members on how to vote and not to allow others to influence their choice of candidates in the election.”

The radio programming also supported this wider community outreach:

“The reception we got came from all the nooks and crannies of the state...we were amazed sometimes that somebody will be calling in from as far as Koluama, you can see that they listened, and they were enlightened, and I must say the program really helped [improve awareness]”.



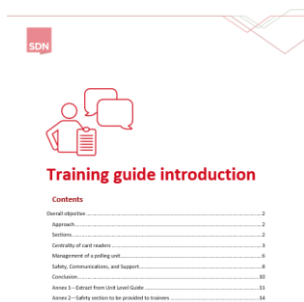
Evaluation focus group discussion participants, Ogbia LGA, Bayelsa state. Photo credit: Ayibakuro Matthew

Whilst community members appeared to have greater awareness of the election day process, and election-related violence was diminished in the 2019 election despite a close outcome, one element of electoral malpractice remains entrenched according to FGD respondents. Vote buying remains commonplace, with community members justifying it on the grounds that elections are often the only time they interact with elected representatives and that given most live day to day in terms of earnings, they feel the need to be compensated for taking a day off from working their fields or selling their wares to participate in voting. This offers a contradiction with the findings of the project's post-election survey which suggested that 54% of respondents claimed not to have sold their vote in 2019 that can perhaps be explained by the fact that voters do not see it as selling their vote, but simply being rewarded for their participation. It also highlights an important point, that even when voters are better informed about an issue, it does not necessarily mean they will apply that knowledge in practice.

Prospective voters spoken to for this evaluation also expressed concerns about the ability of the police to effectively ensure peaceful polls – regardless of how well trained they were – with the army, state security service and in more riverine areas the navy, seen as being the main enforcers of election security in practice. Like the issue of ad-hoc INEC staff being replaced on the eve of elections through informal networks, the example of the police's perceived lack of authority to manage election security is another example of Nigeria's electoral processes not always functioning in practice as they should on paper; a challenge for any intervention looking to work closely with the key stakeholders involved. Despite this, the project was able to build strong relationships between key stakeholders working to improve the quality of polls and reduce electoral malpractice. One political party representative highlighted how some of the project activities:

“Were attended by different political parties and opinion leaders, securities agencies and some other stakeholders. It was not like a programme that was organised by a specific political platform and there is this kind of free interaction where even though we are from different political parties and agencies we were interacting freely with one another because it was organised by an independent organisation that creates the platform.”

Beyond the November 2019 election, it was also noted by INEC staff interviewed that the training materials and knowledge acquired were used in their planning for the Central and West Senatorial District by-elections held in the state in December 2020, as well as feeding into the development of the state's strategic and election project plans.



Example of training guide material for INEC staff

Targeting the training unit of INEC was a strategic decision by SDN, even though there remain question marks about the culture of institutionalizing knowledge at INEC or the police, or the budget availability to cascade the trainings using the training-of-trainers approach. INEC officials themselves admitted, that “the training department is the busiest department in INEC because at any point in time we have one training or the other, but lack of funding is what is hindering us from passing on such knowledge”. Nonetheless, the examples of the training content and learning be used to shape future planning and election events is a clear example of the project’s impact.

Sustainability

Ensuring the sustainability of a project that is focused on a specific and time-sensitive event is not easy, but SDN put in place mechanisms aimed to ensure that the impacts of the project were not limited to the election process only. The use of a training-of-trainers approach with INEC staff, and targeting of the training unit within the commission, was welcome and in theory improves the sustainability of the project. But individuals interviewed for the evaluation highlighted that internal training budgets for this type of trickle-down training were lacking, and almost totally absent in the case of the police. Furthermore, the institutionalization of learning culture is still weak in these institutions meaning that the internal structures limit the impact of the training-of-trainers model. This is something beyond the scope of SDN to resolve but serves as a useful reminder to implementers and donors alike that even projects with well-designed sustainability elements, may not see the envisaged long-term benefits if the institutions being partnered with have internal shortcomings.

Whilst INEC staff confirmed that the institution does offer a lot of training to its staff, and hence there are opportunities to embed the modules that SDN helped to develop into standardized training modules, this would need to be done at the national level, rather than the state level:

“The decision to implement the institutionalization of knowledge gained through trainings like this are planned at the national level so I cannot say that such plans exist. But when designing our training manuals at the headquarters, INEC engages and seek the opinions of CSOs. So, for instance if SDN has a plan to sustaining this knowledge, we will advise that they go to the national level and discuss the need to include some of these things into the INEC training manual”.

Given the budget, timeframe, and scope of this project this type of engagement would have been difficult to achieve, but SDN can certainly use its connections to the central INEC office to share this training material and encourage the electoral body to use some of the content as it updates its manuals. Officials have already used the pamphlets produced under this project informally in subsequent Bayelsa state election processes such as the 2020 senate races.

The lessons learned workshop, which brought together key stakeholders for a de-brief and to identify lessons learned from the project, showed that there was willingness across stakeholders to stay engaged even though the gubernatorial election had concluded. Creating a working group, to meet on a bi-annual basis, for example, would have allowed for the partnerships to be further sustained in a more formal setting and would have offered a platform for a continuation of dialogue about areas where working together would support ongoing efforts to improve election processes and planning in the run-up to the general elections and next round of state polls. The need for collaborative and advanced planning between INEC and partners was highlighted by several individuals spoken to for the evaluation as being key to ensuring the seamless implementation of any future projects.

Finally, and somewhat outside of the scope of this project, was the subsequent Supreme Court decision to overturn the election result announced by INEC in Bayelsa state⁶. SDN staff were concerned that, “the court ruling, has in a way reduced the confidence of the people and that it might have a negative effect on voting in subsequent elections”. This unforeseen event could have an impact on the sustainability of the project as although citizens may have greater knowledge about how to protect their ballot on polling day, the court decision may contribute to a feeling that their vote ultimately did not count in 2019.

UNDEF value-added

The United Nations is well respected in the Niger Delta. This helped further the credibility of the intervention among key stakeholders such as INEC and the police. However, INEC officials were also keen to praise SDN for the way they coordinated and handled engagements throughout the project and appreciated that UNDEF had empowered them to do so. They also noted that whilst there were several other CSO-led projects around the election, they predominantly focused on election observation and so UNDEF, through funding this initiative which aimed to strengthen the key actors when it comes to the election process, offered an important, but different focus in support of the election process in Bayelsa.

SDN noted that the flexibility demonstrated by UNDEF was welcome and allowed them to adapt the project to respond to an ever-changing environment, “we communicated them that this activity because of X, Y or Z couldn’t be done but I will use the fund for another activity which was also granted, so that flexibility to some extent is another good trait we notice in our relationship with UNDEF”. Staff were also keen to highlight that the reporting requirements UNDEF set strengthened their own internal learning processes and some of these have been absorbed as best practices for the future.

⁶ The Guardian Nigeria, “Supreme Court’s verdict on Bayelsa is final”, 27 February 2020 - <https://guardian.ng/news/supreme-courts-verdict-on-bayelsa-is-final/>

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

(i) Conclusions

- 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 how knowledge should be applied was viewed most favorably.
- Nigeria's electoral processes do not always function in practice as they should on paper which poses a challenge for projects to become as impactful as they are effective.
- Voters and training attendees showed an improved understanding of their election rights and how election processes should unfold.
- Gender targets were set and enforced by SDN across the project's activities.

(ii) Recommendations

For UNDEF

- Encourage grantees working with institutions like electoral commissions or other state bodies to devote a period at the start of the project to discussing planned activities.
- Continue to be flexible in supporting alterations to the proposed activities that are still in keeping with the overall outcomes and objective of the project.
- Working closely with, for example election management bodies, may lead to implementation challenges, but the benefits of partnering with these institutions for a project's overall impact and sustainability are significant.

- Advise potential future grantees that training-of-trainers approaches with institutional partners, may not have the trickle-down effects envisaged if the institutionalisation of knowledge within that institution is weak.
- Encourage potential future grantees to factor informal realities into their risk mitigation planning. Nigeria's elections formal processes are not always adhered to in practice and informal realities can impact on outputs and outcomes.
- Integrate the lessons from this project evaluation into the UNDEF lessons learned online platform⁷ to ensure that they are applied, when supporting future initiatives targeting state-level elections in Nigeria.
- Encourage grantees to support local businesses and enterprises where possible when requiring services in the conduct of their activities as this offers an additional benefit to targeted communities.

For the grantee

- In developing mechanisms or surveys for measuring impact think about how to include not just whether the learning or knowledge has been acquired but how it is applied in practice. In the case of this project an element of election observing or partnering with existing groups of observers to gather more data about the project, would have further enhanced the ability to demonstrate impact.
- Where possible engage with key partner organisations in the design of the project. INEC has a CSO desk set-up for this in each state for example. Where this is not possible, allocate some time at the start of the project for finalizing specific activities that fit within the wider project outcomes and objectives.
- To further enhance the sustainability of a project, take a multi-level approach to engaging with key stakeholders. Engagement with INEC officials in Abuja, in addition to at the state level, could have seen the training materials embedded into wider INEC approaches that would extend across the country.
- Think about cost-effective or cost-neutral ways of sustaining networks built during the project. A working group that would meet bi-annually, or a less formal WhatsApp group, would provide a space for the continuation of discussions about how to improve the election environment in the state in the periods between polls.
- In addition to ensuring that there is a social media element of the project, which is increasingly crucial, think about ways of measuring the impact of online reach and engagement using software such as Crowd Tangle.
- Consider focusing not just on election day, but also on pre-election events such as a campaign rallies and political party primaries, which have proven to be regular flashpoints in elections in the state, and elsewhere in Nigeria.

⁷ <https://www.undeflessonslearned.org/>

- 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. Lessons Learned

- 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 was seen as an independent and impartial arbiter.
- Impactful training is not just about the quality of the information communicated, but the way it is communicated.
- Measuring the acquisition of knowledge is just one component, it is also important to try and measure, or show, how that knowledge is applied in practice.

VII. Annexes

Annex 1 - Evaluation Questions - Interviews

In addition to using the broader questions for evaluation set out in the UNDEF evaluation manual further questions, questions specifically related to the project in Bayelsa State, Nigeria were asked. Below are some examples that were used. This is not an exhaustive list.

Relevance

- Why is this issue of electoral integrity an important one to be focused on in Bayelsa state?
- What shaped the decision to focus only on three LGAs in the state? And how were these selected?
- Why was it important to engage with INEC on this project and how did this collaboration come about?
- How was SDN able to leverage and sustain existing relationships (and build new ones) with key electoral actors in the state?

Effectiveness

- How were the INEC officials/security agency staff and prospective voters selected to attend the training events of public forums?
- What did you learn from attending the training/workshops and how did you use that new knowledge during the election cycle?
- How much of a challenge was it to work with INEC to deliver the project given the many requirements on their time? Did the changes they proposed to the project (the increased size of workshops and failure to hold some proposed outputs) have a noticeable impact?
- In particular, what impact, if any did the failure to hold dialogues between INEC and political parties have on the project?
- Was the effectiveness of the public outreach campaign limited by the limited use of local languages? Or, if local languages were used, how did this improve and support public engagement on the issues?
- How did the project target the INEC trainer of trainers for example? Or the citizens to be engaged in the public campaign?

Efficiency

- 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?

Impact

- 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?

Sustainability

- 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?

UNDEF value added.

- What value-add did UNDEF provide to the project?
- Did UNDEF's funding support an area that was ignored by other key stakeholders?

Questions for Focus Group Discussions

The evaluator will start by asking for brief introductions and provide a short explainer of the purpose of the meeting. The discussions will be centered around the following key themes:

- What did you learn from the training/workshop you attended as part of this project? Did you hear about similar initiatives on radio or on social media?
- Did you share this learning with others? Who and how?
- How did you apply that learning during the election? And how will you use this knowledge going forward?
- For the FGD with voters (straw poll of whether they voted).
- How else can elections be better supported in the future?

Annex 2 – Interviews and focus group discussions conducted.

Organization	Individual(s)	Location/Date
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
Citizens of Otuasega community, Ogbia Local Government Area	Focus group discussion	10 June 2021 – Ogbia LGA
Creek FM	Amos Owefighe, presenter	10 June 2021 - Yenagoa
All Progressives Congress	Comrade Tonye Bobo, party official	10 June 2021 - Yenagoa