

NIGERIA STABILITY AND RECONCILIATION PROGRAMME (NSRP)

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KEY MESSAGES

	PAGE
<u>ON THE GROUND: STATES WHERE NSRP HAS FIELD PRESENCE</u>	
1. VIOLENCE PERSISTS IN THE NORTH EAST	1
2. KADUNA MOURNS, BUT MANAGES A SMOOTH TRANSITION	2
3. INDUSTRIAL UNREST TURNS VIOLENT AS ATTACKS PERSIST IN RURAL PLATEAU	3
4. MORE HIGH PROFILE KILLINGS IN KANO	4
5. ANXIETY IN NIGER DELTA OVER INSECURITY AND POOR GOVERNANCE	5
<u>THE NATIONAL CONTEXT</u>	
6. NORTHERN LEADERS OPPOSE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY BILL (PIB)	6
7. CORRUPTION ERODES GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMACY	7

*Disclaimer: The contents of this briefing note do not necessarily reflect the views of DFID or the UK Government.

ON THE GROUND

1. VIOLENCE PERSISTS IN THE NORTH EAST

Violence and bloodshed were reported throughout December 2012 in several Northeastern states, especially Borno and Yobe. The sheer capacity of Jama'atu Ahli Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) to maintain its strike capability against security and civilian targets, despite the heavy losses to leadership and combatants visited on it by the Joint Task Force (JTF) over the past nine months, continues to cause concern to government officials, security operatives and a frightened public. Many had expected that the reported arrests and killings would have curtailed the insurgency. However, JAS showed surprising resilience and sporadic killings and destruction were reported across several communities and urban neighbourhoods, while JAS retained control of a number neighbourhoods in Maiduguri and Damaturu where it seems able operate at will. Suspected JAS militants continued to target security operatives, politicians, traditional rulers, religious leaders and unsuspecting worshippers in both Islamic and Christian worship centres.

The public perception of the JTF was further diminished as security agents were accused of various human rights violations, including the summary execution of suspects. At the same time, the JTF recorded the arrest of a number of suspected JAS leaders and militants and the confiscation of arms allegedly stockpiled by the militant group, including a cache of weapons recovered in early December said to have been intended for use in planned attack on Christmas Day codenamed 'Operation Black Christmas'. There were indications that the JTF had improved its intelligence gathering capacity as the security forces also reportedly intercepted information on a planned attack on a military barracks in Maiduguri during the festive period. Amidst persistent suspicions and tensions in civil-military relations, the intelligence gains of JTF are apparently the result of financial rewards now offered to informants by the security forces. Sources claim that the JTF gives a reward of up to ₦40,000 (about \$250) in exchange for any credible information received. The JTF had promised such bounties in November for information leading to the arrest of JAS leaders.

Improved intelligence and enhanced counterinsurgency are forcing JAS to change its tactics. There is an increasing incidence of deadly attacks on villages and neighbourhoods after midnight. Border communities, too, are more and more the targets of attacks, allowing the perpetrators to escape across the border. Suspected JAS militants also increasingly targeted ordinary individuals associated with neither government nor security agencies. Such killings are generally executed by unidentified young gunmen, and the victims may be suspected of passing information to the security forces. At the same time, given the endemic nature of poverty, it is feared that the introduction of monetary rewards could distort intelligence gathering, resulting in innocent persons being arrested and even killed on the basis of unfounded information provided in exchange for cash. This would further swell the overcrowded detention centres of JTF with innocent suspects, when sources already report that the security agencies dump sick and dying innocent suspects at hospitals.

The outlook for the near future is that a weakened JAS insurgency will continue into the New Year and increasingly target rural communities with little security presence. On its part, government is likely to continue to forge ahead with the military solution – which the security agencies and government officials see as working – especially since dialogue with JAS has been off the agenda since December 2012.

2. KADUNA MOURNS, YET MANAGES A SMOOTH TRANSITION

Kaduna State was overwhelmed by the tragic death of Governor Patrick Ibrahim Yakowa on 15 December in a helicopter accident. The governor had been the first from the Southern part of this deeply polarised state. Given the allegations of some Southern Kaduna elements in recent months that violence in the state was being sponsored by some Northern detractors of Yakowa, there were fears that his death could prompt an outbreak of violence. However, the circumstance of the Governor's passing (in an air crash outside the state, which also claimed the life of Gen. Owoaye Andrew Azazi, former National Security Adviser (NSA)), did not encourage conspiracy theories of the kind that might have sparked violence.

Before Yakowa's death, on December 1, Kaduna State had conducted elections for 23 local government area councils. These were substantially free of violence, and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won 22 out of 23 LGA chairs. Although some protests surrounded the elections, they were another indicator of the largely successful efforts of the Yakowa administration to stabilize and secure the state. The smooth transition of power to Alhaji Mukhtar Ramalan Yero, erstwhile deputy governor, and the selection of Ambassador Nuhu Bajoga (erstwhile State Chairman of the PDP) as deputy governor, both of whom, like the late governor, owe their allegiance to Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo (himself a former governor of the state), also demonstrated consensus and stability among the ruling power bloc.

The prospect for the New Year in Kaduna is that the newly inaugurated Alhaji Mukhtar Yero administration will sustain the peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts of his predecessor.¹ The return of power to the historically dominant Northern Kaduna is likely to pacify those elements disturbed by the shift of power to the South that followed Sambo's elevation to Abuja. However, for minority Southern Kaduna peoples the prospect of producing another governor after the death of their champion appears a remote one. Some Southern Kaduna leaders claim that the appointment of Bajoga as deputy governor has reduced the leverage that the South has in the party. These perceptions – of a loss of power, and impossibility of regaining it – are likely to revive agitation for the creation of a Southern Kaduna State.

3. INDUSTRIAL UNREST TURNS VIOLENT AS ATTACKS PERSISTS IN RURAL PLATEAU

Sporadic violence persisted in rural communities in Riyom and Barkin Ladi LGAs of Plateau State as animosity continued between Berom and Fulani people. While there were no open confrontations between the adversaries, attacks and killings by unknown assailants were reported in several communities. In one incident, in Bagad village in Riyom LGA, two women were killed and ten houses burned. In response to this new pattern of violence, the security task force and the state police command has threatened to hold community leaders responsible for future attacks.

The long running industrial action by local council workers demanding the implementation of the national minimum wage came to a dramatic climax in December. Irate workers, whose

¹ NSRP sources.

salaries had been withheld for several months, attacked government officials. The incidents occurred after the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) mobilized its membership to join the strike in solidarity with its affiliate members in the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE). This led to a total strike and paralysis of public services in Plateau in December. Subsequently, aggrieved workers reportedly attacked and burnt the residences of prominent serving politicians from Langtang South LGA, including the LGA chairman, House of Assembly member and commissioner.

Tensions are likely to persist in Plateau in 2013. No political settlement to the conflict is in sight, and the state government continues to blame unnamed external forces for fomenting violence. Relations between the state government and security forces, especially the STF, have not improved, with the governor publicly upbraiding the security forces for poor performance on several occasions. The controversial decision of an Abuja High Court to nullify the results of the bye-elections of October last year for the senate and House of Assembly seats is also generating tensions. Allies of the governor on the elections and have since been sworn in.² New dates have not been fixed for the elections.

4. MORE HIGH PROFILE KILLINGS IN KANO

The spate of killings of prominent politicians in Kano State continued with the assassination of another member of the state House of Assembly on 14 December. Like earlier high profile victims, the Hon Danladi Isa Kademi, who had represented Gaya State Constituency, was the victim of a drive-by shooting by two gunmen on motorbikes. It is not clear why JAS should be targeting legislators, and there are suspicions that political interest groups in the highly factionalized world of Kano politics may be committing assassinations under the cover of the insurgency. The security agencies appear to be in the dark as regards the identity and motivation of the killers.

The renewed targeting of telecommunications infrastructure further heightened the public's sense of insecurity. Militants attacked the facilities of two companies, MTN and Airtel, a few days before Christmas. This raised concerns that the disruption of communications was a prelude to a campaign of attack over the Christmas period, since security agencies have reportedly previously used telecommunications technology to track suspected militants.

Security agencies reported that improved collaboration with community leaders and civil society during the month had enhanced intelligence gathering, resulting in the arrests of militants and the interception of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Consequently, there were no successful major attacks on public buildings and security operatives in the state. Two potentially serious attacks, on 3 December apparently targeting officers of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) on patrol, and on a mosque, did not cause serious damage as the explosives apparently missed their targets.

However, despite improvements in civil military relations the intensifying political polarisation in the state makes the outlook for Kano in 2013 precarious. The hard-line approach of the state governor appears to have pitched him against interests within the ruling party, the opposition All Nigerians Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Kano Emirate Council. During the

² NSRP sources.

month, the state governor also battled patent medicine dealers over plans to relocate them from a popular market. There were also indications of mobilizations among religious sects. In December, members of the radical ElZak-Zaky Islamic sect paraded around central Kano with the photograph of their Zaria based leader, Sheik Ibrahim Elzak-Zaky. Although no reason was given for the procession, it is feared that the mobilisation may lead to tension between rival sects.

5. ANXIETY IN NIGER DELTA OVER INSECURITY AND POOR GOVERNANCE

The Niger Delta was visited by the anticipated escalation of crime driven by the lead up to the Christmas period. There were several reports of kidnapping of both prominent Nigerians and expatriate workers of oil prospecting and servicing companies. A particularly notable incident of kidnapping was that of Prof. Kamene Okonjo, octogenarian mother of Finance Minister Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala. Okonjo was abducted from her residence in Ogwashiukwu, Delta State. Delta State had in the last few months become a haven for kidnapers. The victim was later released and there were conflicting reports as to whether or not ransom was paid. Gunmen also kidnapped four South Korean staff and their Nigerian colleague of the Hyundai Heavy Industries Company Ltd in Brass, Bayelsa State. An attempt to kidnap four female corps members serving in Rivers State failed after the kidnapper abandoned the victims when confronted by security operatives. In addition, piracy, oil bunkering and the illegal refining of oil persisted in the creeks of the Niger Delta. In one case, pirates attacked a tanker, the SP Brussels, and abducted four Indian sailors.

There were indications of a resurgence of protests against oil companies in parts of the Delta. In early December, about 100 aggrieved youths barricaded the premises of the oil terminal operated by the Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) in Twon Brass, Bayelsa State. More than 350 community protesters also temporarily occupied the Nembe 1 complex of the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria in Bayelsa State. These protests witness the rising disillusionment of Niger Delta peoples regarding the gains anticipated from the amnesty programme and the Jonathan presidency. Advocacy groups in the Delta have started voicing their disappointment with the performance of the Federal and State governments and local councils. The December 15 helicopter crash in Bayelsa State, which caused the deaths of Yakowa and Azazi, generated outrage across the region. It highlighted the slow progress of work on the East-West Road that started over five years ago. Many believe the frequent use of helicopters by prominent politicians would be unnecessary if the road had been completed.

The outlook for the region in the New Year appears increasingly precarious. A worrisome trend observed in December was the decision of ex-militant leaders to add their voices to the critics of government agencies responsible for development projects in the region. Ateke Tom of the defunct Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) and Asari Dokubo of the defunct Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) became the latest critics of the slow pace of development in the region and called for the removal of Godsdan Orubebe, Minister for Niger Delta Affairs. The ex-militant leaders had earlier in the year been mobilising support for the Jonathan administration, especially during the strikes against the removal of the petroleum subsidy. Fears of a resumption of militancy are heightened by the resumption of criticism of the administration by ex-militant leaders following the decision of the Federal Government to

cancel the huge surveillance contracts awarded to companies controlled by them. The controversial contracts were probably cancelled following negative international and national reactions to a news report about them.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

6. NORTHERN LEADERS OPPOSE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY BILL (PIB)

The debate on the Petroleum Industry Bill suffered a setback during its first reading on the floor of the Senate due to overwhelming opposition by northern senators. The senate leadership withdrew the Bill when Northern Senators carried out their threat to oppose the Bill, based on a position paper prepared for the Northern Governors Forum, Northern Senators Forum and the Northern Caucus in the House of Representatives. Contentious issues in the PIB include the proposal to establish a Host Community Fund, government divestment in the national oil company, reduction of investment in exploration of frontier oil, and the proposal to give the Minister of Petroleum discretionary rights to set royalties.

The North opposed the Host Community Fund because it would earmark additional funds to oil producing states that they already see as favoured by the allocation formula of the Federation Account (it is reported that four major oil producers – Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers – already earn more revenue from the Federation Account than all 18 Northern states combined). Northern interests fear that they would lose out in the public sale of shares in the national oil company and the plans to reduce exploration of frontier oil, since four out of five of the frontier oil fields lie in the North. The North also suspects that the petroleum minister, in recent years appointed from the Niger Delta, could use his/her discretionary powers to reduce royalties and thereby lower the margin going to the Federation Account, which would particularly impact the cash-strapped Northern State governments.

The opposition to the PIB is the latest manifestation of Northern anxiety over the rising inequalities between the Northern states and some southern oil producing states. Many northern leaders, including some governors, have pointedly linked the insurgency in the north to its deprivation under the current revenue allocation formula, and especially the payment of derivation revenues to Niger Delta states, including for offshore oil. Northern opposition to the PIB is likely to alienate the people of the Niger Delta who have been advocating for an increase in derivation revenues. The issue of revenue allocation is likely overheat the polity as debates over the amendment of the constitution gather momentum in the New Year.

6. CORRUPTION ERODES GOVERNMENTAL LEGITIMACY

The publication of the 2012 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International in early December confirmed perceptions that corruption has increased in the country since the 2011 elections. The survey ranked Nigeria 135th out of 176 countries, making it the 35th most corrupt country in the world. The unwillingness of the government to fight corruption has become a subject of concern among Nigerian civil society. For instance, legislators accused of collecting bribe from individuals and companies involved in the oil subsidy scandal have

not been prosecuted. The president has also ignored allegations of corruption levelled against some of his ministers, notably the Minister of Petroleum Resources and the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs. There is a widespread perception that the decision of the government not to prosecute suspected corrupt officials has encouraged impunity as it suggests official sanction for graft. However, government denies corruption charges and claims anti-corruption agencies have wide ranging mandates and powers to prosecute officials for graft.

Reported cases of corruption amidst growing unemployment and poverty rates are decimating popular support for elected governments. Poor performance of governments at all levels has been implicated in the rising incidence of criminality and militancy. There is also a strong perception that corruption has undermined the capacity of the government to address the security challenges facing the country. Public perception of corrupt and inept leadership is reminiscent of Nigeria's Second Republic before military intervention in 1983. By 1983, there was widespread consensus that President Shehu Shagari could not stop the looting of the public treasury. Similar sentiments are currently being expressed about President Jonathan. Although there is no evidence of public support for military rule, there are indications that Nigerian leaders have not totally ruled out the possibility of a military intervention. President Goodluck Jonathan's repeated calls to the Nigerian military to protect the country's nascent democracy only reinforce this impression, and the government's generous funding of the military and regular promotion of military officers are coming to be seen as ploys to buy loyalty and satisfy the soldiers sufficiently to ensure they stay in the barracks.