

# CONFLICT BRIEFING NOTES

*CONFLICT BRIEFING NO. 20, January*

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\*\* All reports are based on anonymous NSRP sources.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The state of insecurity in Nigeria's North East remained critical as insurgents intensified attacks in the region and launched more 'hit and withdraw' attacks in neighbouring Cameroun. Against this background, there were concerns about the prospects of conducting elections in affected states and LGAs. This prompted the resolution by the House of Representatives, which empowered INEC to issue voter cards to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), in order to ensure that they are not disenfranchised. The development has triggered efforts by the political parties to reach out to and canvass for votes of the IDPs. The humanitarian situation remained challenging in Maiduguri and other communities in northern Nigeria as camps and host communities have been stressed by the ever increasing influx of IDPs after the JAS attacks on Baga, Monguno and surrounding communities.

Political campaigns undermined security in several states as tensions mount. Much of the tension derived from the perception that the opposition All Progressive Congress (APC) was leading in the polls as the PDP has been deeply factionalised after the December party primaries. The evidence of the ascendancy of the APC is the fact that it now controls the House of Representatives after aggrieved legislators who failed to secure the PDP ticket left the party in droves. The tensions were aggravated by reported attacks targeting the president during his campaigns in Bauchi, Gombe and Katsina and the attack on the bus of the PDP presidential campaign in Jos.

The Niger Delta witnessed the highest number of politically-motivated violence in January. Clashes between supporters of the PDP and the APC have occurred in Rivers state leaving an unknown number of persons severely injured. In Delta State, controversy about the conduct of the PDP primaries has resulted in a split in the once vocal and formidable Urhobo Progress Union (UPU). Most of the incidents of violence have been carried out by armed groups linked to political parties and politicians. The apparent involvement of ex-militant groups in political violence has raised fears about the prospects of security in the post-amnesty period. This is especially the case after some militant leaders threatened to resume the militancy if President Jonathan loses the elections.

## **Context Analysis/Conflict Profile**

### **Political**

The commencement of distribution of PVCs to IDPs has raised hopes of elections being conducted in Nigeria's troubled North-East region. The impetus for this was the resolution of the House of Representatives that approved the participation of IDPs especially in the Northeast in the upcoming general elections. Both government and opposition parties are mobilizing to gain the support of voters as it seems the IDP camps will have sizable voting population.

The political scene was dominated by political campaigns in all states. In Borno and Yobe states campaigns were affected by the security situation following fears that militants will target political rallies. However, the incumbent governors of both states who are running on the platform of the APC seem favoured to return given divisions in the PDP. In Kano State, the visit of the presidential candidates of the two dominant political parties – PDP and APC- raised the tempo of activities as each of the parties struggled to pull crowds to the rallies to demonstrate their popular appeal. The intense campaigns have been largely peaceful, partly because of the uncertainties about the Kano governorship candidacy for the PDP and the consensus within the APC around the candidacy of deputy governor. In contrast to the relative calm in Kano, Kaduna state has witnessed rising tensions. This is largely due to the balance of power among the parties arising from the fact that the popularity of Buhari and the APC governorship candidate as well as deep divisions in the PDP that seems to be neutralizing the incumbency factor enjoyed by Vice President Namadi Sambo and Governor Mukhtar Yero. The heightened tension in the state is evidenced by the widely reported threat of violence by Yero against any group that attacks PDP campaigns.

In Plateau state, the PDP has also been weakened by internal crisis arising from the party primaries. Some PDP gubernatorial aspirants have decamped to the APC. Dame Pauline Tallen, former deputy governor and Professor Wapmuk decamped to the APC during the party's presidential campaign in Jos. This latest move by the decampees from Plateau South senatorial district is expected to hurt the campaign of the PDP in the southern Plateau where the APC governorship candidate hails from. The PDP is also expected to be hurt by protest votes against the decision of Governor Jang to impose his kinsmen as successor. It is against the backdrop of growing public dissatisfaction with the PDP in the state that angry youths reportedly attacked and burnt 2 buses used for the campaign of President Jonathan in Jos.

Most of the incidents of political violence have occurred in the Niger Delta, especially in Rivers State where the PDP and APC are competing to capture the votes. Several incidents of violence have been recorded in the state following attacks by suspected cult and armed groups allied to either PDP or APC chieftains. For instance on Tuesday, January 6, APC supporters who were travelling to attend the APC Presidential flag-off ceremony were shot by unknown gunmen. Similarly, two PDP candidates were shot in their houses while preparing to attend the PDP Governorship campaign. Suspected APC gunmen reportedly opened fire on a vehicle conveying PDP members from Okrika LGA to Bori to attend the rally. This led to the death of one party member.

In Delta state, some Urhobo politicians have protested the emergence of Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, the current Delta North senator as the PDP Governorship candidate. The Urhobo ethnic group appear divided on the matter as some opposed to Okowa claim he was imposed on the party by elements linked to James Ibori who is currently serving a jail term in the United Kingdom. The campaign among the Urhobo to secure the governorship has been boosted by the emergence of Otega Emerhor as governorship candidate of the APC.

In neighbouring Bayelsa State, tension persisted in relations between Governor Henry Seriake Dickson and Dame Patience Jonathan. Dickson accused the Bayelsa chapter of the Transformation Ambassadors of Nigeria (TAN) of promoting 'subversive tendencies' and 'personal interests' rather than the genuine objectives of the organisation. He also sacked two female aides (Remi Kuku and Maria Ebikake) believed to be allies of Dame Jonathan. The criticism of TAN and sack are believed to be linked to Dickson's intention to reduce the influence of the first lady in the state.

Across the region, cult groups either seeking attention of politicians or aligned to them are demonstrating their capacities to unleash violence. This is evidenced in increased armed violence at the community level amongst rival cult gangs. There is the likelihood of a repeat of the 2003 elections scenarios which was characterised by massive assassinations and kidnaps. A key indicator of this is the observed reunification of ex-warlords and threats to resort to violence if Jonathan is attacked while campaigning or is voted out of office.

## **Social**

The reported attack and occupation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base outside Baga, (close to Lake Chad) by JAS after several hours of engaging the Nigerian army led to massive displacement of civilians. Most of the fleeing persons moved to Maiduguri or crossed the border to Chad and Cameroon. The mass movement of persons further undermine human security situation and put more communities receiving the IDPs under stress. There are fears that the insurgents may infiltrate the camps and host communities by disguising as IDPs. These fears have led communities to be more vigilant especially with the emerging trend where young girls have been enlisted as suicide bombers.

The phenomenon of female suicide bombers is likely to lead to further abuse of rights of women. This is evidenced by the intensification of body search of women and girls in public places such as markets- a practice which is discouraged in Islam- since female suicide bombers killed innocent citizens in schools in

Kano and the Maiduguri Monday market. The pressure arising from the attempts of JAS to invade and take over Maiduguri has also made body searches more common in Maiduguri and neighbouring towns and communities. It is feared that this will affect social cohesion and may adversely affect the counter-insurgency effort.

This is particularly so as youths are becoming paranoid about protecting their communities from insurgents. Many of the youth groups have been involved in extra-judicial killings. For instance, a group of 'vigilant' youth who belong to the Mosque Security Vigilance Committee reportedly killed a man they suspected to carrying a gun out of suspicion that he was a JAS member. The deceased man had gone to patronise one of the tea sellers close to the mosque for his breakfast when he was lynched. Subsequent investigations by the police revealed the suspect did not have any weapon on him and had been killed in error.

The insurgency ravaging the North East has badly affected development work in the region as aid workers have been forced to abandon their humanitarian activities. Borno State, the most hit by the insurgency as well as the flight of aid workers, was home to several high profile national and international development personnel and aid workers. This has affected capacity to deal with epidemics such as the outbreak of Cholera in an IDP camp in Biu, which killed 27 persons. Government authorities reported declining number of volunteers and health personnel.

### **Economic**

With improved security and influx of more people into Kano city from within and outside the state coupled with political rallies and campaigns the economy of Kano has improved within the month under review. The reduction of the fuel pump price to 87 also contributed immensely towards improving the economic activities in the state and the country at large. Although motorists are yet to reduce the transport fare the economy started to experience the impact of the reduction as the state witnessed an increase in the volume of transportation and movement of motorists within the month.

Non-payment of salaries in several states affected livelihood of civil servants. The public workers have consequently embarked upon strikes to demand for fairer job environment and benefits. Such strikes have affected the quality of life of residents. For instance, the strike by health workers has paralysed all the government hospitals and primary health care clinic in Plateau State.

Across the Niger Delta, preoccupation of government officials with campaigns and other political activities have led to the abandonment of development projects intended to improve the quality of lives of the people. However, there has also been significant reduction in scale of oil theft in the region. This may be attributable to the increasing high cost of doing such business (through alleged payments to military and other security personnel, armed gangs along the waterways, etc) in the wake of dwindling oil prices.

### **The National Context**

#### **Increasing Incidences of Suicide Bomb and Regular Attacks in Yobe and Neighbouring states**

One of the growing evidence of the spread of the insurgency was the brazen attacks by insurgents on targets in Yobe, Gombe and Bauchi states during the month. Attacks began on New Year day when a bomb exploded in a bus killing the suicide bomber and six other passengers and injuring others. An injured survivor reported that the suicide bomber might have well been on his way to detonate the bomb in Fika market before it exploded in the bus.

Two persons were also killed the following day after a bomb laden Volkswagen Golf intercepted by the police exploded and killed an Inspector, a driver and injured others at the Divisional Police Station in Potiskum. The Yobe State Police Commissioner, Marcus Danladi who confirmed the incident said police acted on public complaint over the vehicle, which was strangely parked at the market area without identifying the owner.



The police put the vehicle under surveillance and the owner was later apprehended. They took him to the station where the bomb exploded while searching the vehicle.

Security operatives repelled an attack by militants on Babangida town 50 kilometres north of Damaturu when JAS laid siege on the town and engaged security operatives in a fierce gun battle. The militants attacked the military base located north of the town and the police station situated in the southern part as well as the Local Government secretariat, the Government Lodge and the boarding primary school in the area. Other targets in Yobe State included Gujba, Katarko and Damaturu where JAS insurgents made a failed attempt to invade the government house. The intensification of attacks on Yobe may not be unconnected with attempts by JAS to stall elections in the North East. However, there are indications that JAS improved on its capability after it started occupying territories it invaded. This with happened with the conscription of young men in towns and villages it occupied into its fighting force. Local sources have said that JAS relied on forced conscription to swell its ranks. Conscripts are offered money and killed if they refuse to fight. For instance, 40 young people were abducted in the village of Malari on New Year's eve, when JAS attacked the village. The men were taken to the residence of the village head where they took away those aged between 15 and 25 years and dismissed the rest after they were made to listen to a religious sermon. The conscripts were allegedly trained in camps in Gwoza, the centre of JAS's self-declared "Islamic caliphate", and Bama.

### **Tension as military tackles indiscipline in the rank and file**

The Nigeria Army announced early January the dismissal of 203 soldiers who were court various disciplinary offences bordering on dereliction of duty and disloyalty. Trial of another batch of 21 soldiers and high ranking officer started in Lagos where the prosecution claimed the soldiers had abandoned their posts and allowed the insurgents to gain control of towns and villages in the North East. Another report in the month indicated that army authorities had dismissed 227 soldiers over their refusal to fight JAS when the insurgents attacked and overrun Mubi last October. The group of 227 soldiers, allegedly dismissed staged a protest in Jos, the Plateau State capital. The protesting soldiers asked the GOC 3rd Armoured to prevail on President Goodluck Jonathan to intervene because they were unjustly dismissed without any known offence and without the benefit of fair hearing. Also four soldiers were dismissed at the headquarters of the Nigerian Army Records in Lokoja over similar offences. They were among the over 3000 military personnel, comprising other ranks and officers that have been pencilled down for the sack after the fall of Mubi. More controversial was the death sentence passed on 54 soldiers who allegedly mutinied against their GOC in Maiduguri.

The purge in the military is an effort by the authorities to redeem the image of the institution that has been dented by the serial failures in the counter-insurgency campaign. There have been reports of the Nigerian Military hosting hundreds of JAS sympathizers who support the terrorists with arms and information about troop movement. Sympathizers of JAS have been alleged to attack fellow soldiers, to burn tanks and military vehicles and sometimes, to surrender their positions to JAS without a fight. The allegations of insiders and fifth-columnists has led to loss of motivation among the soldiers who increasingly become reluctant to fight over fears that information about troop movements have been linked to the insurgents. For instance, an initiative by combined team of soldiers and local vigilantes to recover Bama town (that has been under JAS occupation for over three months) was frustrated when they were ambushed at Mairamri, allegedly based on some sabotage. Also five soldiers were arrested for giving information to the JAS during the December 1<sup>st</sup> attack on Damaturu. Given the enormity of the challenge, it remains to be seen how far the authorities will go. It is feared that the 54 soldiers sentenced to death may be killed to deter others. Civil and human rights campaigners have been advocating for pardon and or retrial to save the convicted soldiers from facing the firing squad.

The Nigerian army also removed General I Ibrahim as the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 7 Division, Maiduguri. The removal which coincided with President Jonathan's recent visit to Maiduguri is reportedly in furtherance of the military's resolve to all impediments to the counter-insurgency campaign. General Ibrahim replaced Major-General Ahmadu Mohammed who was removed in 2014 after a mutiny by military officers who were outraged that some senior military commanders were reportedly stealing salaries and allowances soldiers.

### **Military alleges international conspiracy to undermine counter-insurgency efforts**

The embattled Nigerian military has made an allegation about an international conspiracy against Nigeria's national security as the country battles to contain the JAS insurgency in parts of the North. Major General Chris Olukolade, Director of Defence Information, made the allegation while reacting to the controversial CNN report which featured footages of interviews with individuals claiming to be Nigerian soldiers. The interviewees alleged neglect by military authorities, adding that use of inferior weapons to fight JAS has made it impossible to defeat the terrorists.

Tensions have characterised relations between the military and the major powers since the US refused to sell attack helicopters to Nigeria. The military authorities consequently called off training programmes with the United States Army. Also efforts to gain international support at the Paris summit convened by President Francois Hollande last year failed. The desperate measure to buy weapons in South Africa also earned the military very bad publicity with the seizure of the cash and aircraft used for the mission.

### **Regional Campaign of Violence by the JAS**

JAS has increasingly taken on governments in the region that are mobilizing under the framework of the Multinational Task Force. The leader of the JAS threatened Cameroon's President Paul Biya in a video posted on YouTube. JAS made good their threat by attacking a military base in the northwest of Cameroon forcing many to flee the area. On 18<sup>th</sup> January, the JAS attacked two villages in the Tourou area in Cameroon, kidnapping up to 80 people including 50 young children.

The attack on Cameroon has resulted in growing recognition of the need for a regional approach to combating the insurgency. Chadian authorities responded by sending forces to support Cameroon in its efforts to dislodge JAS insurgents. Both the ECOWAS and African Union have also become more involved and called for strengthening of the multinational force. As a result of the responses, Cameroonian military have been able to secure release of kidnapped persons and recovery of captured territory. For instance, the army reported it had killed 143 militants who attacked one of its army bases at Kolofata near the Nigerian border. The Cameroonian authorities also announced the release of 24 out of 100 persons captured by JAS.

### **Impact for Programming in Select States (Borno, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna, Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta)**

#### **Insecurity continues in the Northeast as the Nigerian military continues Combating JAS After Baga Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base attack**

On 4 January, JAS seized the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base outside Baga (near Lake Chad) after several hours of intense fighting. Nigerian civilians living in Baga were forced to flee across the border to Chad and a number of women and children fled to Maiduguri City. With several hundred people killed, hundreds of homes burned and businesses damaged, Baga is now internationally known as the worst and most violent attack committed by JAS since 2009. JAS also continues to forcibly conscript people in territories under their control to join their ranks by threatening to commit acts of violence against them if they refuse money offered to them.

For programming that focuses on counter-insurgency as well as de-radicalization and counter-radicalization, it may be important to consider providing additional psychosocial support for communities where young men and women have been forced to participate with JAS violence through conscription. Cross border programming for peace and security may also be impacted by the inability of the Nigerian government to ensure the protection of multinational forces in the Northeast region.

### **JAS Violence Negatively Impacts Programmes Supporting the Health Sector in the Northeast**

The insurgency ravaging the Northeast has badly affected development work in the region as aid workers have been forced to abandon their humanitarian activities and flee insecurity and targeted attacks. However, due to the insecurity in the Northeast, many health sector efforts have been adapted with aid workers attempting to implement programming with military accompaniment or simply abandoning the programming in Borno, as well as Yobe and Adamawa States. For health programmes operating in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States, it is important to consider how to localize trainings and operations in the programme target communities quickly in order to train enough local community members on assistance programmes to implement to their community—whether in their local government areas (LGA) or if displaced to an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp.

### **Issues with the Permanent Voters Cards in the Northeast Brings Worries among the Borno Population of Political Marginalization**

INEC began distribution of Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) in Borno state between 10 and 15 January. Despite the limited distribution of PVCs, the INEC said that it may be impossible for elections to hold in the Northeast in February due to difficulties in accessing the polling stations due to the worsening security situation. However, this information contradicted the decision of the House of Representatives on 16 January that approved the participation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Northeast. Therefore, for all programming supporting electoral activities, it is important to consider additional advocacy to Federal agencies such as INEC to assure that the issues with the PVC cards and polling station security do not inhibit the ability of the Northeast to participate in a democratic electoral process. Also, it is important for programmes supporting IDPs throughout the country to assure that the basic human needs of the IDPs are not neglected nor exploited during the electoral period.

### **Fear of Infiltration of JAS Fighters lead to Extra Judicial Violence**

Within the month of January, extra judicial violence was committed by community members against young people on the accusation of being connected to JAS. On 16 January 2015, a young person who self-identifies as a member of a local Mosque security committee attacked and killed another young man in public who he accused publically of carrying a weapon and therefore being a member of JAS. After investigation the victim was not connected to JAS nor was he carrying a weapon. The Police State Commissioner and the Emir of Kano made a plea to the public to not take law enforcement responsibility away from officials mandated to enforce it. They also urged that society should not assume one's connection with JAS without evidence, as this can divide societies and alienate members of society. For programmes working on promoting youth engagement in civic initiatives in Kano State, the recent targeting of young men may inhibit the participation of young men in any public activities for fear of association with JAS. Also, for programmes working on psychosocial support at the community level, beneficiary selection should not just focus on young girls but also include young men who have been targeted by other members of society as potential JAS members.

### **Early Warning Signs of Electoral Violence in the Middle Belt and Niger Delta should be Monitored Closely**

Campaign buses supporting President Goodluck Jonathan were attacked on 10 January in Jos North LGA close to an STF government checkpoint. Frustration by the STF for the attacks was responded to with arrests of a number of young men—an action that subsequently drove youth to protest those who were arrested. Several clashes have been reported in Rivers States between armed groups allied to the APC and PDP. For peacebuilding programming operating in the Middle Belt, it is essential to create conflict sensitive adjustment plans for programming activities in the Middle Belt region to assure that potential electoral violence does not negate peacebuilding successes achieved to date.



## **Recommendations**

1. Programmes working on civic education, improved governance and increased transparency should collaborate to reduce potential political violence by strengthening CSOs working at the community and state-levels and incorporating traditional leaders into programme activities to assure community-level buy-in.
2. The strengthening of the health sector is essential in the Northeast to assure that overall basic human needs of both IDPs and host community members that remain without access to healthcare due to the JAS insurgency. It is recommended to strengthen the Ministry of Health in Northeast states as well as health programming at the community level by rapidly converting training and supplies for healthcare services to community representatives to continue delivering in the absence of additional personal to do so.