

PRELIMINARY REPORT

# Counting Votes:

Ward-level collation during  
Nigeria's 2019 election

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#NigeriaDecides**2019**

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## Ward-level collation during Nigeria's 2019 election

### Background

The 2019 general elections is the sixth general election conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) since the return to civilian rule in 1999. Presidential and national assembly elections followed governorship, state houses of assembly/ and FCT area council votes are scheduled to take place across a two-week period. However, the 2019 election was marred by INEC's last minute postponement of the presidential and national assembly election by a week - from 16 to 23 February 2019 - citing logistics challenges just hours before voting was due to start. This disrupted the INEC calendar which specified that presidential and national assembly elections would always be held on the third Saturday of February of every election year. This is the third consecutive time, INEC has postponed elections, having done so during the 2011 national assembly elections during voting, and ahead of the 2015 on security grounds.

Despite the postponement, and the assurances by the election management body that it was ready to conduct the election on the new date, there were significant delays in the opening of polling units across the country when voting did get underway on 23 February. More so, election day was characterized by localized incidents of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching/ destruction and general voter apathy as the national voter turnout rate dipped from 43.7% in 2015 to just 35.6%. It is worth noting that since 2003, voter turnout has progressively decreased in each electoral cycle. This is a concern given the increase in the number of political parties (from 28 to 91), increase in voter registration (from 68,833,476 to 84,004,084), and increase in permanent voter card (PVC) collection rates (from 82.03% to 86.63%) between 2015 and 2019. The latter two at least suggest a renewed interest in the electoral process.

## 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS



**43.7%**  
Voter Turnout



**68,833,476**  
Registered Voters



**28**  
Political Parties



**82.03%**  
PVC Collection rate

## 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS



**35.6%** ∨  
Voter Turnout



**84,004,084** ^  
Registered Voters



**91** ^  
Political Parties



**86.63%** ^  
PVC Collection rate

But beyond the casting of ballots, what happens during the counting and tallying phase of the electoral cycle is critical to its overall success. Collation of election results is an important election activity that can increase or decrease its credibility depending on how the stakeholders involved handle it. Ward-level collation - Nigeria has 8809 political wards - is very important because it is the second stage of the collation process, with errors at this stage being fed into, and shaping, the overall results.

Ahead of the 2019 general elections the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), an accredited observer, and its partners including Premium Times Nigeria and Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) deployed 8,809 persons to polling units and wards covering all 36 states and the federal capital territory. It also developed software like Zabe SR together with other apps - CDD Election Tracker and Zabe 1.0 - to observe the elections and provide real-time information on the opening of polling stations, voting process and collation exercise. At the Ward Collation Centre (WCC), CDD and its partners deployed Zabe SR to report incidents and results from centres nationwide. Reports reveal that the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections witnessed serious and significant challenges in the area of results collation at the ward level. The five main challenges identified are: logistics; misconduct, inefficiency and poor technical knowledge of INEC and ad-hoc staff; security lapses and intimidation of collation staff by security agencies; inappropriate activities of political thugs and party agents; and the denial of access to media and observer groups.

## Legal framework & guidelines for election collation in Nigeria

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) and the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) provide the general guidelines for the collation of election results. These norms are complemented by the regulations and guidelines provided by INEC pursuant to powers granted to the commission in Section 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended). Furthermore, the amended 2010 Act provides guideline for transmission of result from polling units. Section 63(4) requires the polling stations presiding officer to count and announce results at the polling units while 65(1) specifies that after results are announced, the same officer must submit all election materials and the recorded results to any person prescribed by INEC. Finally, Section 73 empowers INEC to issue regulations and guidelines for the collation of result from polling unit to the last collation for the ward or constituency, where the result of the election shall be declared.

In line with this legal framework, sections 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 of the INEC Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections<sup>1</sup> - dated 12 January 2019 - provided clear guidance for collation of election results of the presidential elections from ward level to national level. Sections 36 and 37 of the same document provides procedures for collation of election results

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<sup>1</sup> For details of INEC Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections - dated 12 January 2019 visit [www.inecnigeria.org](http://www.inecnigeria.org)

for Senatorial elections from local government area (LGA)/Area Council level to state level, while sections 38 and 39 provides the procedure for House of Representative races. But reports from CDD observers suggest that issues were encountered in following these laid out collation processes across the elections held on 23 February 2019. Furthermore, in many cases, the late commencement of voting and late closure of polling units led to a chaotic process.

## Key Collation Challenges

### **Logistics**

The hydra-headed logistic challenges that often characterise much of Nigeria's election process resurfaced at the result collation stage as results of most polling units could not be easily transported to WCC's due to paucity of transport. In Enugu state, our observers reported that in Eke Ward in Udi LGA, the collation officer refused to collate at the designated local government collation centre at central primary school, in Eke community, citing a lack of INEC provisions for vehicles to transport them. Instead, all the ward collation officers in the local government decided to use the Udi Local Government INEC office in Udi Community, as the WCC.

In other cases, there was confusion and delays among stakeholders in deciding on the WCC venue. For instance, in ward 2, Aba South LGA, Abia State, as polls closed, a collation center venue remained undecided, delaying the collation process. There were also many instances of last minute changes of locations of WCCs, while some reports noted that the venue being used as the WCC was changed midway into the collation process due to absence of electricity or other necessary logistics.

**Box 1** presents field reports on logistic challenges across various wards as reported by observers and the media.

### **Box 1**

"No one knows the collation ward yet. I am currently at Pedro primary school and nothing is happening yet. The INEC officials are not aware of the collation ward yet. I have been to Saviour primary school but nothing is happening there as well"... **(CDD Observer at gbagada phase I obanikoro/pedro/Shomolu/ Lagos).**

"Ward collation centre transferred to INEC office due to security reasons and lack of electricity. All party agents on ground agreed to the motion from the police officers available." **(CDD Observer, alapata ward/ ogbomoso south/Oyo state)**

"At 8:45pm, 23/03/19, the electoral officer was yet to be seen at the ward collation centre. He then called and instructed the supervising presiding officer to bring the polling units results to the secretariat to collate." **CDD observer at UHIELE ward/ Esan West/Edo**

"Ward collation started @9.15pm, 23/03/19. The collation officers seem a little bit confused. Corpers are begging to be released, so they can go to their respective homes. I doubt if this exercise will be concluded anytime soon as the collation officers are very sluggish."... **(CDD Observer at gbagada phase i obanikoro/pedro/Shomolu/ Lagos).**

"And at the ward collation centres (in Borno State), proceedings took place at night. The same thing was observed with the local government collation centres. Most of the smaller political parties did not have resources to keep their agents to watch proceedings for that long period of time. And such delays, in most cases, favour bigger political parties to possibly manipulate results"... **(Premium Times, Borno, 2 March 2019)**

## ***Misconduct, inefficiency and poor technical knowledge of INEC and ad-hoc staff***

Cases of misconduct and inefficiency on the part of the officials deployed for the collation also undermined the exercise. While some officials lacked knowledge of the collation process, others lacked the basic arithmetic skills needed for quick collation of results thereby leading to errors in the result sheets, inconsistencies in collated figures and delays to the whole collation process. In Kaduna, collation was slowed by late arrival of materials and the incompetence of some presiding officers. Our CDD observers reported that the state governor, Nasir El-Rufai, returned to his polling unit around 6pm on election day to observe the counting of ballots but when he left out of frustration at 9.30pm, the presiding officer was still battling to reconcile the figures.

Beyond issues caused by human error, there were also clear cases of misconduct from officials involved with the collation process. For instance, in Badarawa ward, Kaduna North LGA, it was reported that at least three presiding officers absconded with result sheets. Results for this ward did not arrive the local government collation centre until Monday evening; 48 hours after polls had closed.

In Bauchi LGA of Bauchi state, collation was halted for almost 48 hours at the Baba Sidi Primary School WCC - the largest ward in the LGA with 78 polling units - due to widespread cases of alterations to the result sheets. Some ad hoc staff and materials from polling units in the ward were still missing almost 40 hours after the election ended. The collation officer for Baba Sidi primary school WCC filled all the forms wrongly and his writings were largely illegible according to our observers. The case of alteration of results was widespread in Bauchi LGA.

The analysis from our observer reports also reveals a lack of knowledge about the correct processes to be followed as one of the main challenges encountered during the elections. Instances from across the country suggest that electoral officials were confused as to which results to collate and where to collate. In Imo north senatorial zone, INEC officials were unsure as to which results should be collated at ward level and which should be done at LGA level. Our observers reported how some INEC ad-hoc staff took the result and voting materials for Owerri Municipal to an unknown destination on the night of the election only to discover it was to be taken to Ikenegbu Girls high school. Again, in Imo state there were reports of INEC officials taking counted ballots to the WCC before such ballots were entered into results sheets. Our observers also witnessed several incidences of collation officers receiving or making calls during the collation process in clear contravention of the INEC guidelines.

**“ While some officials lacked knowledge of the collation process, others lacked the basic arithmetic skills needed for quick collation of results thereby leading to errors in the result sheets, inconsistencies in collated figures and delays to the whole collation process.”**

**Box 2** presents field reports across various wards as reported by our observers.

## Box 2

"The results were not posted at the ward collation center and the figures were not even allowed to be taken, the collation officer did not allow observer to come in contact with the result at all." **(CDD observer Saki East LGA, Oyo)**

"Up to 10pm, 23/03/19, at the collation center, there was no collation taking place. Presumably, the collation officer was not available"... **(CDD Observer at SOUTHERN IMAN 1 Ward/Etinan LGA/Akwa Ibom)**

"At the compiling of results at some polling units, some corps members made errors in entering the results in the sheets and caused unnecessary delays and confusions. Such was the case in Ward 2, Unit 10A, Akure South, where a corps member entered the House of Representatives results in the form and titled it Ondo Central Senatorial District"... **(Premium Times, 2 March 2019)**

### ***Security lapses and intimidation of collation staff by security agencies***

CDD received reports of incidents in which personnel from the security agencies<sup>2</sup> were alleged to have intimidated collation officials. In other locations, there was not the adequate security personnel required to guarantee the safety of officials and election results. Furthermore, there were reports of complicity of personnel of security agencies in disrupting the collation exercise. An INEC official in Okrika LGA, Rivers state, said personnel from the security forces invaded their office and snatched the results of the elections for the council. Before the results were snatched, the same security personnel had threatened the collation officials by shooting sporadically into the air.

It was also reported by our observers in same Okrika LGA that during collation at the ward level, a team of soldiers led by an army officer suspended collation and ordered his men to take away all materials, including results being collated by election officials. The materials were carted away with nothing left for the electoral officer to present as evidence for the election. A similar incident was reported at Isiokpo, Ikwerre LGA - again in Rivers state - where according to our observers between 7pm and 8pm on election day the military forcibly entered the INEC Office at Isiokpo and walked out all the ad-hoc staff who were there to present their results to the collation officers. No collation took place. In Akwa Ibom, police officers threatened and assaulted some accredited party agents, election observers and journalists.

Reports of violence during the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections were high in River state. This disenfranchisement of citizens across Rivers state further deepened the gamut of interrogation about the integrity of the process. Despite commitments by security agencies, and peace accord signed by political parties, aimed at ensuring credible and peaceful polls this was not the reality for many votes on 23 February.

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<sup>2</sup> The Inter Agencies Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICESS) is the body that works closely with the electoral management body to ensure election security. This body of security agencies is led and coordinated by Nigeria Police Force.

A breakdown of affected LGAs and the number of registered voters for each is provided by Stakeholder Democracy Network<sup>3</sup>. There were 74,249 registered voters in Bonny Island LGA which saw no election conducted because of disruption at local government office in the morning of election day, largely caused by APC agents alleging that there was no genuine results sheets for the election. In Akuku Toru LGA, home to 106,563 registered voters, there was no election because of dispute in the morning of election day that led to clashes between local youth and the army in which 1 officer and 6 civilians were reported to have been killed<sup>4</sup>. In Ikwerre, where 151,390 voters were registered, the election held but the INEC electoral officer reported that collation was disrupted by soldiers who came to the INEC office and forcibly ejected ad hoc staff and collation officers. She also alleges that she was held hostage and pressured to fabricate results.

In Okrika LGA, elections held but allegations surfaced that a military officer had taken materials from 4 wards potential disenfranchising a percentage of the 79,018 registered voters. In Emohua, a LGA with 124,080 registered votes, the ward collation units were moved to the INEC office to ensure the safety of election officials. Nonetheless clashes ensued between soldiers and armed militias leading to the death of one ad hoc staff. Furthermore, the Emohua LGA collation officer reported final results to the INEC state office despite knowing having seen him since 8pm on the day of the election. Ward collation officers confirmed that collation did not take place at ward level either.

**Box 3** presents field reports across various wards as reported by observers and the media.

### Box 3

"we have just only one police man in kwakwalwa polling unit and with it looking like we are going to be there till night I think we're going to need more security men on ground for all the counting of the votes"...**CDD Observer at G/BUBU/G/YARO Ward/ Wamakko LGA/Sokoto**

"security agents chased everybody outside with gun when the vote is about to count"...**CDD observer ISALE-AGBEDE Ward/ Lagos Island LGA**

"after a successful election in my polling unit in umuabali unit 004, ezeleke/ogbodiukwu ward 1, we moved to the collection center in umuekwule, we were directed to go to our local government in apumiri ubakala in one primary school agbo. when we reached their around 8:50pm, there was heavy security presence everywhere, both army, police and civil defense all over the place, they didn't allow me to enter inside. They said I have nothing to do inside even when I show them my ID card and other materials in my possession."...**CDD observer Umuahai North LGA, Abia**

### *Inappropriate activities of political thugs and party agents*

The inappropriate activities of political thugs and some party agents further contributed to collation challenges. In some instances, some political thugs and party agents unduly interfered in the process, threatened collation officials and even violently disrupted the collation processes.

<sup>3</sup> SDN is one of CDD's partners. It is an international non-governmental organization that helps facilitate community development from rights-based perspective. [www.stakeholderdemocracy.org](http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org)

<sup>4</sup> Soldier, Five Others Killed in Election Violence in Rivers, THISDAY 25th February, 2019 <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/02/25/live-updates-nigeria-decides-2019/>

In Okrika LGA, Rivers state, it was reported that at the end of polls, there were heavy gunshots and electoral officials could not collate form EC8A (the result sheet) at many polling units. In Ahoada West LGA, violence between thugs of the two main political parties disrupted and eventually forestalled the collation process. The LGA was due to tally up to 83,062 votes, given the citizens registered. A Premium Times journalist was forcibly evicted from the collation centre for the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial election. The interference of politicians, their thugs and agents, seriously marred the collation process, for instance in Borno State, the interference of politicians delayed collation.

### ***Denial of access to media and observer groups***

Across the country, election observers and the media were denied access to collation centres thereby raising suspicion as to the transparency of the collation exercise. In Ughelli, Delta state, observers and journalists were banned from accessing the INEC collation centres to monitor the collation of results. Media reports claimed that a special team of mobile policemen were stationed at the three entrances of the collation centre to prevent observers from accessing the centre<sup>5</sup>.

**Box 5** presents field reports across various wards as reported by observers and the media.

#### **Box 5**

'I was not allowed to come inside the ward collation centree by the security agents even after showing them my ID CARD as an Election Observer'- **Anambra state FEGGE VII Onitsha South**

## **States most affected by WCC challenges** ◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

Ward level collation challenges were widespread, but Lagos and Osun combined were responsible for 22% of incident reports (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Other states with high levels of incident reported were Sokoto (9%), Rivers (8%) and Kaduna (7%). The incidence in Rivers states were largely associated with the activities of political thugs and security personnel. This may be connected with long running battle among top political figures in the states.

It is interesting to note that states most affected by the Boko Haram insurgency - Adamawa, Borno and Yobe - did not feature among the states with the highest level of reported incidence associated with collation challenges. Kano, Katsina and Plateau, which each had turnout in excess of one million votes, also did not feature among the states with high numbers of collation incidence. This implies that the drivers of collation challenges are not just associated with party

5 Read more at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/journalists-observers-banned-from-ughelli-inec-collation-centre/>

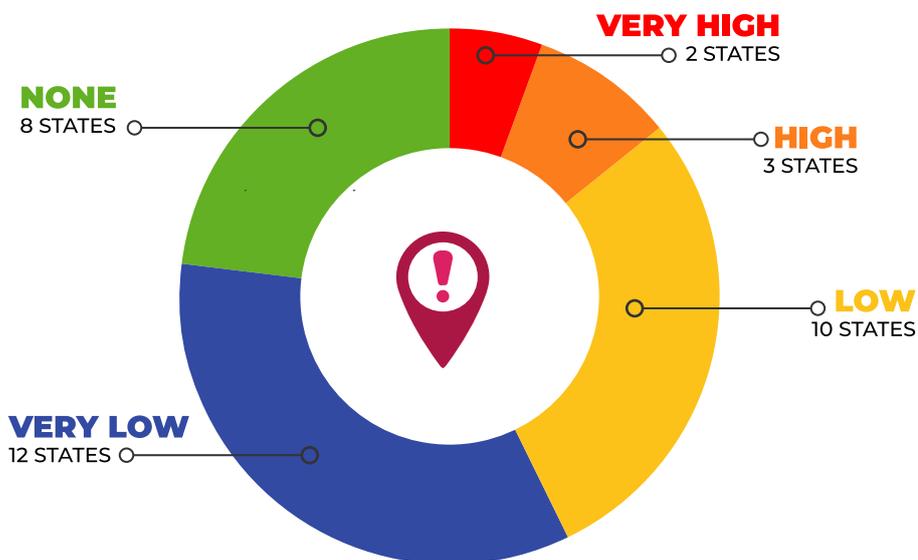
dominance or the political landscape in any state but can be accounted for by the multiplicity of factors we have identified.

**Table 1:** Breakdown of states by reported collation incidence

Very High (10 -12%)	High (7 - 9%)	Low (4 - 6%)	Very Low (1-3%)	None
Lagos (11%)	Kaduna (7%)	Imo (3%)	Zamfara (1%)	Katsina
Osun (11%)	Rivers (8%)	Ogun (3%)	Yobe (1%)	Nasarawa
	Sokoto (9%)	Niger (3%)	Gombe (1%)	Ondo
		Kano (3%)	Kebbi (1%)	Ebonyi
		Edo (3%)	Delta (1%)	Plateau
		Kogi (4%)	Borno (1%)	Benue
		Oyo (4%)	Akwa-Ibom (1%)	Jigawa
		Abia (4%)	Adamawa (1%)	Bauchi
		FCT (6%)	Bayelsa (2%)	
		Anambra (5%)	Enugu (2%)	
			Kwara (2%)	
			Taraba (2%)	
<b>2 States</b>	<b>3 States</b>	<b>10 States</b>	<b>12 States</b>	<b>8 States</b>

**Fig. 1:** Breakdown of states with high and low reported collation incidence

**BREAKDOWN OF STATES WITH HIGH AND LOW REPORTED COLLATION INCIDENCE**



# Implications of the WCC collation challenges for Nigeria's 2019 elections and democracy

## ***Cancellations***

The immediate and direct implication of the ward level collation challenges identified in this report is the cancellation or declaring inconclusive of elections. This election witnessed an unprecedented amount of cancellation of results<sup>6</sup>. These instances place a further administrative and financial burden on INEC, who are charged with organizing supplementary elections in such affected areas.

In Benue state, the pronounced challenge at the ward and local government level was over-voting. In several cases the total accredited voters number was less than the total vote cast. In Makurdi LGA, collation officers and party agents had to go into long arguments before reaching a compromise on how to go about declaring the results. In Imo North Senatorial District results were cancelled in three LGAs, causing the elections to be declared inconclusive. In Akwa Ibom, the votes from Ikot Ekpene senatorial district with 10 LGAs was also cancelled as a result of failure to use card readers, and over voting with some polling units recording above the number of registered voters in contravention of the provisions of the INEC guidelines.

In Rivers State there were an unprecedented number of cancelled votes: more than 942,000 as declared by INEC. Cancelled votes exceeded the votes cast (666,000) by nearly 300,000. This was a result of two LGAs where election collation did not take place at all and four other LGAs where ward collation was moved to the local government centres but seriously disrupted by violence. The violence around collation had a severe impact on election officials. Two ad hoc staff died amidst shooting as they moved to local government collation in Degema and Emohua LGAs. Whilst clashes in Obio Akpor LGA meant that four wards were not collated, contributing to turnout of just 13% in the LGA. Overall disruption in Rivers state reduced the turnout from over 60% in 2015 to under 20% in 2019.

## ***Voter Apathy***

Another implication is the possibility of increased voter apathy in future elections among voters who felt their ballots did not count as a result of irregularities associated with collation and who may not turnout to vote in future elections. Voter turnout declined for the 2019 presidential election. In fact, 35.6% turnout is the lowest rate recorded since the return to civilian rule in 1999.

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<sup>6</sup> It is vital to note that results cancelled across country did not affect the declaration of a winner for the presidential election, rather it affected the emergence of winners of national assembly seats in the affected states because the later did not meet the constitutional threshold for a winner to be announced. Following the cancellation @ INEC Nigeria in order to maximize costs and utilize logistics has announced it would conduct supplementary election same day (Saturday 9th March 2019) with governorship and house assembly polls in the areas elections could not hold because of either violence or infractions from the votes cast. The states affected by cancellation and supplementary [re-run] national assembly election include, Lagos, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Imo states, etc

## Off-cycle increase

The possibility of large amount of post-election litigation by aggrieved candidates may see several processes re-run. In doing so expect an increase in the number of off-cycle elections to be conducted by INEC.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2019 presidential and national assembly elections held on 23 February 2019 witnessed significant challenges in the area of ward level collation of results. Generally, the collation was sluggish and characterized by localized cases of violence, disruption and irregularities. The collation challenges included logistics; misconduct, inefficiency and poor technical knowledge of INEC and ad-hoc staff; security lapses and intimidation of collation staff by security agencies; inappropriate activities of political thugs and party agents; and the denial of access to media and observer groups. All these factors undermined the smooth collation of results at the national level, impacted negatively on the integrity of the election and may even contribute to the weakening of Nigeria's long-term democratic development. As such CDD wishes to propose the following recommendations to key stakeholders:

**INEC:** Early commencement of training and retraining of personnel and ad hoc staff on collation procedures is vital to strengthen capacity. Ad hoc staff should be recruited early, properly trained and examined, then deployed to participate in off-cycle elections where possible so as to acquire practical experiences on the processes of collation. Permanent WCCs should be identified and properly equipped with the requisite infrastructure required for collation. Personnel found to have involved in misconduct during the collation process should be pursued and prosecuted.

**Civil Society Organizations/Media:** A continued push for the amendment of the Electoral Act 2010 to allow for introduction of electronic vote transmission will reduce error in the calculation process and improve the pace of collation. CSOs and the media must continue to engage INEC with evidence-based information on how to improve the collation process.

**Security Agencies:** The unprofessional actions exhibited by security agents call in to question the nature of election security training and the quality of the briefing the deployed security agents received prior to the 2019 election. Individual personnel of the security agencies found to have been interfering in the collation process should be prosecuted and sanctioned appropriately. Commanding officers of locations where security agencies are reported to have participated in interfering/disrupting collation should be held accountable in instances where individuals are not.

**Party Agents:** The leadership of political parties should educate their party agents and supporters on the need to strictly adhere to code of conduct for peaceful election especially during the collation of results. The parties should be held responsible for the actions of individuals acting in their name, with relevant penalties to be decided on.



**Centre for Democracy & Development**

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The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organization

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