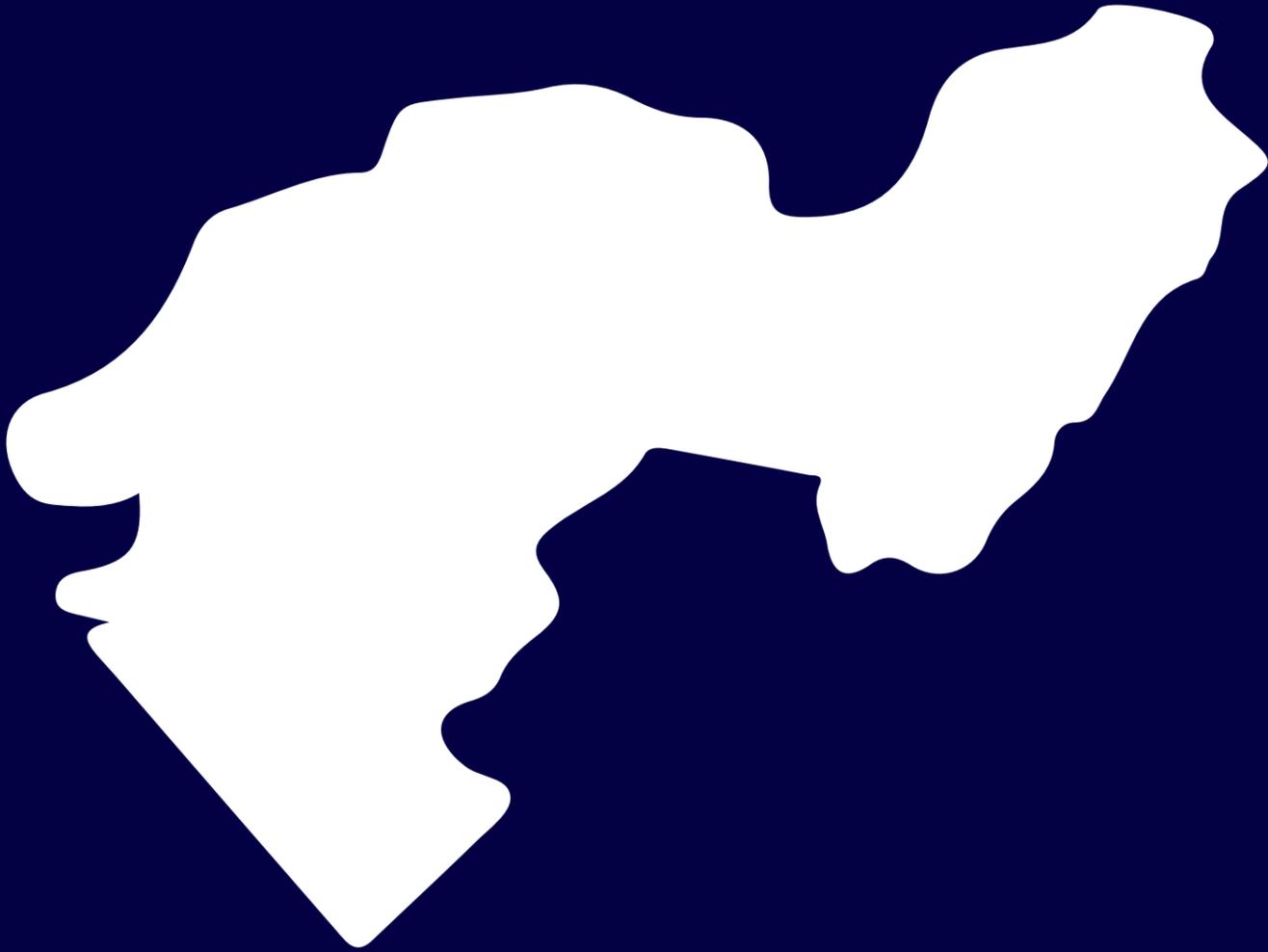




Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement



**CSOs' ROUNDTABLE ON
THE 2020
OFF-CYCLE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION
IN ONDO STATE**

COMMUNIQUE

August 27, 2020

Grand Capital Hotel, Akure, Ondo State

PREAMBLE

On Thursday, August 27, 2020, the Centre for Democracy and Development, a not-for-profit think tank which focuses on issues of democracy, governance and capacity building in Nigerian and West Africa, organised a Roundtable for Civil Society Organisations on the 2020 off-cycle governorship election in Ondo State.



The meeting brought together civil society across the 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State.

The Roundtable which took place at the Grand Capital Hotel in Akure, Ondo State focused on defining the roles of stakeholders in the electoral process, while mapping out the challenges capable of undermining the credibility of the October 10, 2020, gubernatorial election in Ondo State. Participants deliberated on a vast array of issues affecting the electoral process, including lessons learnt from the challenges and infractions, which marred the credibility of the recently concluded Local Government Council elections of Saturday, August 22, 2020. The meeting also served as an opportunity for participants to confer and make recommendations on possible solutions to the challenges, which could hinder free, fair and credible election.

The CSOs that participated in the meeting include Ondo state Development Forum, EyeMax Care Foundation, Centre for Environment and Community Development, Knowledge and Care Providers, Kids&Teens Resource Centre, Melville Women Initiative, Star Ruby Initiative and Human Development, Gender Equality and the Girl Child Development Foundation, Beacon for Hope and Action of Life, Community Development and Adherence Support Initiatives, Young Shall Grow Educational

Initiative, Oloki Memorial Foundation and A-One Readers Education Foundation.

Others are: Girls 2 Women Research and Development Foundation, Excel Mankind Wellbeing Initiative, Women Advancement and Development Initiative, Life and Peace Development Organization, Upline Centre For Development, Healthy Mother and Child Foundation, St Joavics Foundation, Handicapped Education Foundation and Global Assistance For Better Day Organization

Participants at the Roundtable made the following observations:

1. The high level of violence during the LGA election has created a tense environment ahead of the governorship poll. The Council elections recorded low voter turnout, poor participation by marginalized groups, as well as the destruction and defacing of campaign billboards in various parts of the state. The Ondo State LGA polls were characterized by anomalies including the use of thugs to disrupt the electoral process, the firing of gunshots to frighten and intimidate voters, and deliberate attempts to prevent opposition parties from actively participating in the election.
2. The Ondo LGA election further exposed the lopsided structure in Nigeria's electoral process. Security operatives saddled with the responsibility to protect the people were found intimidating the electorates. Every participant, stakeholders and political actors came to the poll with different agenda and this majorly led to the spike in violence.
3. In most of the polling units, there were no result sheets; findings in places like Ifedore showed that election observers were asked to leave the vicinity and results were fraudulently written in these areas with the supervision of security operatives. These anomalies hold serious implications for the conduct and outcome of free, fair and credible elections in Ondo State, come October 10.
4. There is a growing fear of stockpiling of arms ahead of the election. There have been cases of rival partisan camps openly displaying arms or engaging in ex-



change of gunfire just to show that they also have access to firearms – a means of pressing opponents. Most times they do this in the presence of Police officers who serve as aides to the political actors.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the pace of work at the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and awareness on the Commission's policy on COVID-19 is low. This is the result of the absence or late commencement of voter education across the 18 LGAs of Ondo State. This has also led to the poor understanding of key processes and procedures governing the elections; citizens who should be committed to participating in election stay away due to believe that the system is messed up, especially in the face of COVID-19.
6. INEC has failed to actively engage the CSOs on plans for the Ondo election especially with the new guidelines released on the conduct of an election in a COVID-19 pandemic situation. The electoral body has also failed to be proactive in engaging the people on the guidelines and conduct of elections amid the Coronavirus pandemic. This gap was very much on display during the recently concluded LGA elections, which witnessed people participating without adherence to laid down guidelines; most voters were not aware of how



the COVID-19 pandemic will affect or change the conduct of an election in the off-season election.

7. The lack of adequate attention to the welfare of INEC staff ad-hoc staff, has been a recurring problem in the electoral process and could create further challenges in the coming elections if not proactively addressed. In some polling units during the last election, voters were on the ground but they were no ad-hoc staff to attend to them - they all arrived late.

To address the challenges mentioned above, participants suggested the following:

Political Parties should:

1. Should be sensitized to realize that the responsibility for voter education is not exclusively for INEC and CSOs; the political parties are direct beneficiaries of the voting process. If voters fail to thumbprint properly, the political parties and their candidates will be affected; as such, parties have a duty to provide funds and implement voter education.
2. Appropriately engage the party agents and members of political parties on their roles at the polling units, collation centres.
3. Ensure party supporters are educated to refrain from using hate speech, and singing hate songs, which cause provocation and results in violence

Security agencies/ Police should:

1. Be alive to their responsibilities and provide security in some areas, especially those linked to Edo states.
2. Ensure that the security of voters and election officials are assured and kidnapping which is the stock in trade in that area must be nipped in the bud.
3. Ensure that officers deployed to serve on the election day are not compromised or partisan with any political affiliation

INEC should:

1. Conduct a comprehensive security risk assessment to identify areas with high risks of security challenges.
2. Intensify voters' education as this is key to getting election process right, the level of voters' apathy in the state almost the bane of the whole process.
3. Ensure that all sensitive and insensitive materials arrive at the polling unit on time. A situation of absence of result sheet or any material could create conflicts during the election.
4. Sensitize its own staff, because, during the last LG election, most of Ondo state Independent electoral Commission (ODEIC) staff were compromised, the bad eggs within the system should be flushed out.
5. Take responsibility of taking proper care of their ad-hoc staff. Cases of ad-hoc staff littering on the field without the provision on the day's meal and you have them become very vulnerable to all sort of vices should be curbed.
6. Take into consideration, challenges that have been presented due to COVID-19



pandemic especially making greater efforts to protect the elderly persons and the vulnerable ones among videos.

7. All contents produced – videos, messages, banners, flyers – should be translated to Nigeria’s local languages for easy assimilation by the citizenry.
8. Set up a Memorandum of Understanding for a peace pact by all political parties and their candidates.
9. Provide needed support for People with disability and the aged-people to exercise their own civil rights. They should be allowed to vote first. Also, educational material should be made available for the PWD.

Civil Society organisation and Media should:

1. Continue to advocate for peaceful, fair, and credible elections. Not just in gatherings as these, we must continually advocate in our homes, churches, market places, irrespective of the timing.
2. Join INEC in educating electoral officers especially the ad-hoc staff, voters’ education should start early not at the peak of elections.
3. The media should show a lot of restraint in their reportage, the environment is highly volatile and is strategic in reporting during elections

Women Participation:

1. To ensure women participation in the election, security operatives should work more to protect women who are actively participating in the election. Most of the politically active women are always prone to attacks, this is not encouraging.
2. There should be strong advocacy for women supporting women during elec-

tions or in politics generally.

3. There is a need to go into the negotiation table with the men on the issue of women participation in politics. Men should be made to understand that women are not competitors but partners in governance.
4. Sensitization of women in the need and value they can add to the electoral process. They should be taken away from rumour and fake news, threat and false narratives.
5. Women already in a position of power should mentor other women and encourage participation in politics.
6. Women should be focused on forming their own political parties and the negative narratives of tagging women as prostitutes or wayward for participating in politics must be discouraged.
7. Complacency from women over their own situation, women fail to understand their value in the electoral process. Politics is a game of numbers and the women are more than the men, and this must be put into play to improve women participation in politics.

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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 organisation

Address

16 A7 Street, Mount Pleasant Estate, (CITEC)
Mbora District- Jabi Airport Road, Abuja

Phone No

+23492902304

Email

cdd.abv@cddwestafrica.org

Website

www.cddwestafrica.org