

Niger Delta Weekly: Preventing COVID-19 Related Violence in Abia State

April 19-25, 2020

Description

Lockdowns, physical distancing and other forms of social restrictions have been accepted globally as key measures to contain the spread of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). These measures are crucial in containing the spread of the deadly virus, but they are also exposing residents to increased risk of violence and human rights abuses. In Abia state, clashes between residents and public security forces over the enforcement of the COVID-19 lockdown have resulted in several fatalities. According to data (see map below), clashes between public security operatives and residents caused over 170 fatalities in Abia state between March 2015 and March 2020. Recently, there has been a series of violent clashes between residents and public security operatives over the enforcement of compliance with the COVID-19 lockdown order in the state. On April 17, 2020, for instance, two residents were reportedly killed during clashes with security operatives over issues relating to compliance with the lockdown in Ebem Ohafia community, Ohafia LGA. The incident reportedly sparked off a series of violent protests by residents in the area.

Why it Matters

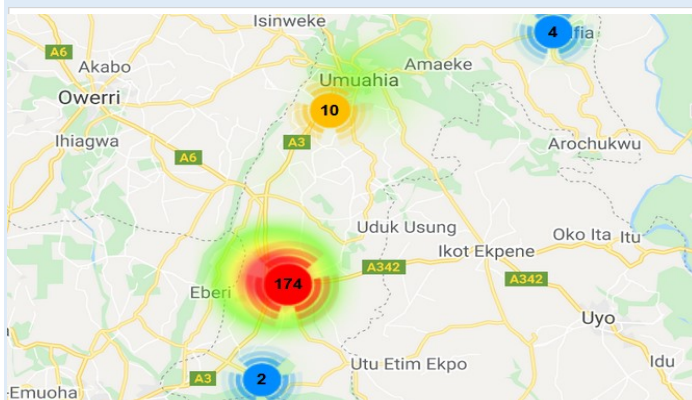
The recent incidents of clashes between security operatives and residents are early warning signs that a prolonged COVID-19 lockdown and any disproportionate use of force to enforce compliance has the potential to trigger public resentment and social unrest. This could have serious socio-economic and political repercussions for the state.

Social: Clashes between residents and security forces over the enforcement of compliance with the COVID-19 lockdown could result in widespread social disorder which could necessitate the adoption of more stringent measures by security agencies. This could cause high levels of stress, anxiety and a sense of isolation among residents, and reinforce communal tensions and incite social disruptions. This could create a general feeling of insecurity among residents in the state.

Economic: Conflict over the enforcement of compliance with the lockdown could result in spontaneous protests and riots that can provide an avenue for hoodlums and criminals to rob markets, loot shops, and vandalize properties. This could lead to loss of economic opportunities and sources of livelihood that can cause further economic disruptions that could outlast the current COVID-19 crisis.

Political: Clashes between residents and security agencies over the lockdown could result in the adoption of more restrictive measures to prevent public dissent. Such measures could increase the risk of human rights abuses and social disturbances. This could undermine government's efforts to manage the COVID-19 crisis, erode citizens' trust in the government, and fuel political instability in the state.

Fatalities Heat Map of Social Unrest and Crackdown by Security Forces in Abia State, Nigeria



Heat Map shows cluster of reported fatalities caused by social unrest and crackdown by security forces in Abia, March 2015 - March 2020. Sources: All data sources formatted on the P4P Peace Map www.p4p-nigerdelta.org.

Prognosis

Unrest over the COVID-19 lockdown has affected the peace and security landscape in Abia state, driven mainly by repressive enforcement measures by security agencies and low level of compliance by residents. Stakeholders should collaborate with the State Inter-Ministerial Committee on COVID-19 and the relevant security agencies to sensitize residents on the need for compliance with the lockdown, and ensure that security operatives adhere to appropriate rules of engagement while enforcing the lockdown in the state.

Contact Us

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Report Incidents: IPDU Early Warning System

Please report any verified incident of conflict to the IPDU SMS early warning system: Text report to **080 9936 2222**

Incident Details: Kindly include the State, LGA, Town, Date, and Brief Incident Description.



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