



Coping with Climate Change as a Cause of Conflict in Coastal Communities of West Africa



Community Entry and Stakeholders Mapping Report

Prepared by

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for

**Inua Eyet Ikot Community in Ibeno LGA,
Akwa Ibom. Nigeria.**

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Picture Showing How Rise in Sea Level and Sea Surge Washed Away Residential Houses in Inua Eyet Ikot, Ibeno LGA.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction.....	5
Brief History and Location	5
Socio-Economic and Political Context	5
Inua Eye Ikot Community Governance System.....	6
Gender Equality	6
Inua Eyet Ikot Community Institutions Governance and Functions.....	7
Environmental and Climatic Characteristics	8 - 9
Livelihood Systems and Analysis.....	10
Agricultural Livelihoods.....	10
Non - Agricultural Livelihood	10
Challenges of Livelihood Systems	10
Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis	11
Causes of Conflicts, Severity and Frequency	11
General Observation and Lessons Learnt	12
Recommendations for Intervention.....	13
Conclusion	13

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List of Abbreviations

AAPW	Academic Associates PeaceWorks
ADP.....	Agricultural Development Program
CCC.....	Clan Council of Council
CC	Climate Change
IEC	Ibeno Environmental Club
CSN	Community Stakeholders Network
EU	European Union
ECOWAS.....	Economic Community for West Africa
FAIMM	Fondazione Accademia Italiana della Marina Mercantile
HOMEF.....	Health of Mother Earth Foundation
LGA	Local Government Area
LGC.....	Local Government Council
WANEP	West African Network for Peace Building

Introduction

Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW) is implementing a project with three partners, referred herein as consortium members, namely Fondazione Accademia Italiana della Marina Mercantile (FAIMM), Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), and West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) with support from the European Union (EU). The title of the project is “Coping with Climate Change as a Cause of Conflict in Coastal Communities of West Africa (C7-WA). The aim of the project is to strengthen West African Coastal Communities’ resilience to cope with climate change and conflict by developing innovative tools related to conflict sensitive climate change (CC) adaptation and prevention of environmental crimes that exacerbate climate change impact on communities as well as monitoring of the impact of climate change as a driver of conflict.

To achieve this, the project intends to develop tools, based on innovative research and global best practices, which will be tested through the establishment of a Community Stakeholders Network, constituted with highly influential community stakeholders’ by AAPW. The CSNs will then be trained to deliver nature based innovative solutions to the CC challenges in the region, through a large-scale capacity building program, targeting communities and local actors. Information about climate change and conflict will be used to update the ECOWAS regional framework for Conflict prevention and early warning.

While, the CSNs will be trained to advocate and mobilize resources to address the CC challenges, the project will also finance climate change mitigation or adaptation interventions of the project targeted communities in the Niger Delta through a small-scale grant scheme.

Brief History and Location

According to the people, Inua Eyet Ikot community in Ibeno Local Government Area was founded in 1423 by the Portuguese merchants during the slave trade. In the 18th century King Jaja of Opobo made several attempts to invade the community; he later succeeded and made the community a slave transit point. Thus, till date, the people of Opobo and Inua Eyet Ikot have some cultural affinity.

Geographical Location

Inua Eye Ikot is a coastal community that is located at the bight of the Atlantic Ocean. It is territory that falls within Latitude: 4.56 North and Longitude: 8.09 East with an Altitude: 7.00m/22.97ft.

Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Context

The people of Inua Eyet Ikot have a rich socio-cultural heritage. They practice their age long tradition, guided by their traditional religious belief system. They have several festivals and worship system that make them resolute in times of conflict or war against an external oppressor. Some of the festivals include: The Abasi Ibena Festival, The Ekpe Society, the Ikata Society, The Nimietim cultural festival, Atfid Society, etc. These, Festivals and deities have social implications in their local administration and

development. The festivals are celebrated at certain times of the year and there are laws that must be adhered to by everybody living in the community. Disobedience attracts serious penalties, in some cases death.

The main occupation of the people is fishing. They also undertake farming and petty trading to an appreciable level. Inua Eyet Ikot has one of the largest fishing settlements on the Nigerian coast. It lies in the Mangrove Forest Belt of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. However, the presence of ExxonMobil Nigeria Limited, Network Oil Exploration Company and Universal Energy Limited, operating in the area, has influence on economic activities in the area in terms of employment, influx of people to the area and other activities. Consequently, most of the youth struggle for employment opportunities in the oil companies. According to them, fishing, which is the major occupation in the area, has become very risky and the catch also very low for those who take the risk.

Inua Eyet Ikot Community Governance System

Inua Eyet Ikot has an inclusive system of governance. Virtually everybody has a role to play, except underage children. It is a communal system with the Paramount ruler, who is the overall traditional head in the Local Government. He oversees the governance system of all the communities in Ibeno Local Government Area. Beneath the paramount ruler are the Clan Heads. Extended family members make up the clans, who constitute the clan council. The clan head is nominated or elected by the village heads, who are the next level of leaders. The villages heads, also have under them the Family Heads. The youth group also play very important leadership role. In the case of Inua Eyet Ikot, the youth group comprises, males and female youth. The Women also have a place in the governance system of the community. They are structured to have a Women Group, that is headed by the wife of the village head. However, for administrative purpose, they also have an elected Chairperson. The Age Grades, Social Cultural Groups and Religious Groups also play a pivotal role in the governance system of Inua Eyet Ikot.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is a key governance issue in the Niger Delta, where patriarchy is a general phenomenon. However, women are involved in leadership processes. There are women associations and groups which are recognized as part of the governance system in the community. Matters affecting women are discussed by the women and decisions are conveyed to the Village head, who transmits their position to the clan head and up to the paramount ruler, depending on the decision and responsible leadership level that should give approval. Women are part of the youth groups and some socio-cultural groups. However, there are some socio-cultural groups that strictly alienate women from being members. Generally, women involvement in the decision making process has greatly improved.

Inua Iyet Ikot Community Institutions, Governance and Functions

S/ No	Institution	Functions.
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1.	The Paramount Ruler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Custodian of law, custom and tradition ▪ Strengthen community peace and stability. ▪ mediation of disputes and facilitates resolutions ▪ Promote development by engaging with development partners
2.	Clan Council of Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist the King in his functions as directed by the King • Represents the community in traditional functions • Conflict resolution • Decision making
3.	The Village Head and Community Council of Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and Represents the Chiefs in traditional functions if directed • Represents the community in traditional functions • Conflict resolution • Decision making
4.	Family Heads and Elders at the Family Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take decision at the family level to support the village head • Information dissemination point to family members • Represent the family in traditional functions • Conflict resolution at the family level • Decision making
5.	Youth Executives Male and Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement instructions from higher traditional authorities • Organize youth programs. • Organize provide community labour, execution of community projects etc. • Provide community security • Organize community entertainment programs etc.
6.	Age Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiate community developmental projects and activities. ▪ Coordinate with donor agencies for the smooth execution and completion of community projects. • Find employment opportunities for youths.
7.	Women Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organize women development programs. ▪ Implement instructions and decisions from higher authorities ▪ Fund and implement community development projects ▪ Conflict resolution
8.	Social/Cultural Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organize social functions (burial ceremonies, special coronations) ▪ Promote the tradition and culture of the people ▪ Settle disputes when the need arises ▪ Provide support and funds to educational and economic activities ▪ Involve in community development efforts (donation of small facilities like chairs, tables, canopies)
9.	Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prayers for peace and stability ▪ Role models ▪ Advisory roles ▪ Spiritual/divine healings ▪ Support community development efforts

Environmental and Climatic Characteristics

Inua Iyet Ikot is located at the bight of the Atlantic Ocean. The community is about 7 meters / 22.97 feet above sea level, so if the sea rises, as has been the case for some time now, due to climate change, the community gets flooded. They are at the verge of being relocated due to destruction of houses by periodic flooding and sea surge. The people also complained about other environmental challenges such as crude oil spill, disposal of non-degradable waste products such as plastics, cellophane materials and metals in the sea and slumps within the community. As a result, the Ibeno Environmental Club was established with branches in most of the communities. The Inua Eyet Ikot Environmental club is said to be very active on environmental protection and management activities in the Local Government.

The entire surrounding of the community, which was covered by mangrove trees has now given way to Nypa Palm. This invasive plant, has taken over a very long and wide stretch of the community mangrove vegetation. Its economic potentials are yet to be ascertained, thus, it is not economically useful. However, it was mentioned, that Nypa Palm can be planted in oil polluted areas to absorb the oil in the soil. It can also serve as a barrier plant to erosion.

Climatic Conditions: The climate in Inua Eye Ikot here is tropical. Inua Eyet Ikot experiences significant rainfall during most part of the year. There is only a short dry season.

The environmental and climatic challenges in Inua Eyet Ikot community are interconnected challenges of rise in sea level, sea surge, unpredictable rainfall pattern, high tide, flood and erosion. According to the people, during the rainy season of year 2021, they experienced very high level of sea incursion into the community. It was a period of high tide and the rains were high during the period. Most of the houses by the



Picture showing Vulnerability of Inua Eyet Ikot What is it showing?

sea- about seventy houses- were washed away, leaving inhabitants homeless. The community leadership, had to allow affected families occupy school classrooms, churches and other open housing structures available.

The immediate impact of the rise in sea level and sea surge, as well as the heavy rain fall is

erosion. As the water recinded, the top soils are washed away. Farmers who made attempt to replant discovered that their crops did not germinate or germinated ones have stunted growth and eventually wither or wouldn't bear fruit.

The sea incursion, resulted in flooding of the community, farmlands were destroyed, most farmers lost their livelihood. Cost of food increased, most businesses were affected; with spread of water borne diseases, there was cholera epidemic and the local economy came to a halt during the period. This resulted to an untold hardship, which according to them intensified the already existing conflict between the Ilaje fishermen

and the natives and ultimately resulted to a full-fledged violent conflict. The Ilajes are migrant fishermen, who settled in Inua Eyet Ikot community for fishing. Their fishing methods are said to be repugnant to the indigenes and when, the indigenes made attempts to stop such fishing practices, it often results to conflict. The same was reported in Akassa. The conflict led to the destruction of lives and properties. Consequently, the Ilaje fisher folks were banished from the community till the time of AAPW visit. Although, the community reported that, there are threats of retaliation from the Ilaje fisher folks, however, currently, the community is relatively peaceful.

It was also narrated that there is an upsurge of boat mishaps, fisher folks missing their way in the sea and appear in different states or countries along the within the Gulf of Guinea; some die from starvation, those who are lucky are picked up by vessels or other fishermen in the sea. All these, are as a result of unpredictable rain, storm and wind direction, attributed to climate change. In addition, to the climatic challenges mentioned, is also the issue of piracy in the sea. The pirates steal engines, kidnap fishermen and on good days only fishes caught are taken away.

Community members also disclosed that the increasing piracy attack on fishermen in the sea, could be as a result of the rising number of fishermen and boat drivers who have lost their livelihood and have become vulnerable and readily available for recruitment to join pirate groups. In describing their ordeal, a fisherman said, “fishing in the sea, have become survival of the fittest, a livelihood where one had to bid his or her family members a would be final farewell with an undertaking for life or dead before venturing into it. Many are dead, some are maimed, yet government wouldn’t respond. Thus, no one is happy going to fishing anymore however, we don’t have alternative livelihood, we are having no choice but to go though, not far into the sea”.

Most indigenous fisher folks and farmers inclusive have lost their livelihood. They depend on oil company jobs, trading, transportation, manual jobs, migration to other areas in search of survival and sometimes, are involved crime. etc.

Rise in Temperature: The level of heat reported is unbearable. AAPW team experienced the heat level in the community during our visit. Temperature level does not have relief from rain or wind from the sea. The temperature is noticeably high and has affected social life. The use of electricity has enabled the people to adapt.

Livelihood Systems and Analysis

Inua Eyet Ikot community is located at the bight of the Atlantic Ocean; that makes it easy for them to practice fishing as the main livelihood in the community. Livelihood in the area can best be described as agricultural and non-agricultural.

Fishing: Based on the foregoing, fishing is a traditional occupation of the people. Middle aged persons in the community who are known for their prowess in fishing are regarded as wealthy among members of the community. They are good at deep sea fishing. Dolphin, barracuda, red sniper, cat fishes, electric fish, whale, shark, mullet, sardine, etc. are some of the fishes caught. Unfortunately, Inua Eyet Ikot community started having conflict with Ilaje fisher folk settlers over fishing methods. The Ilaje use fishing nets and methods that catch or destroy all sizes of fish. Sometimes, the fingerlings that are caught by Ilaje Fisher folk are so many that the decayed ones will

be thrown back into the sea, polluting the water. As a result, the community cautioned them and meted out rules and regulations which they refused to obey. While that was going on, a misunderstanding between two families of Ilaje and Inua Eyet Ikot community ensued, leading to a violent conflict that claimed lives and properties.

Farming: Farming is not a major occupation. According to a respondent, about 25% of the community are involved in farming but only for subsistence purpose.

Forest Livelihood: Very few persons undertake hunting, herb harvesting, snail picking and other related livelihood activities these days, a responded said. According to a him, such activities referred to as work for bush allowance is no longer tenable. The challenge, according to them is that, the bushes are empty, no snails, the herbs are found in distant forest and earning a living from forest resources is a mirage.

Non-Agricultural Livelihood System

As in other communities, the non-agricultural livelihood activities are basically: trading, transportation, skilled and unskilled jobs such as construction works, electrical, plumbing, pipe fitting, carpenters, welding, bricklaying, local craft/artisans, tailors, etc.

Challenges of Livelihood Systems

- Some plants and animals are at the risk of extinction
- Rise in sea level, sea surge and flood
- Unpredictable and heavy rain falls and storms
- Temperature Increase
- Increase in diseases and health issues
- Crude oil spill
- Increase in piracy and kidnapping
- Conflict between Ilaje fisher folks and the indigenous people
- Drug abuse and cultism
- Conflicts associated to oil company or politics

Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis

Issue	Vulnerability	Associated Conflict	Adaptation
Some plants and animals are at the risk of extinction	Loss of Livelihood	Land disputes	Migration to other communities where such plants and animals still exist
Rise in sea level, sea surge and flood	Loss of Habitat	Land disputes	Relocation to other areas within the community
	Loss of Farm lands	Land disputes	Migration to other communities in search of alternative livelihood opportunities
		Land disputes	Allocation of available land to affected persons by community leadership

	Loss of fishing ground	Conflict over fishing areas.	No feasible adaption strategy currently practiced
Unpredictable heavy rain falls and storms	Erosion of top soil causing unfertile soil	No dispute reported	No feasible adaption strategy currently practiced
Temperature Increase	Loss of crops/plants	No dispute reported	Personal adaptation mechanisms adopted, no electricity in community, use of mosquito nets at night and leaving windows open
Increase in diseases and health issues	Personality disorder.	Self-conflict	Adaptations are different ways with different people: Self-medication, use of local herbs or go to a health Centre or hospital where available
High cost of food and materials	Frustration	Self-conflict, illegal actions leading to conflict	Multiple livelihood activities, indulgence in illegal activities to earn a living, etc.

Causes of Conflicts, Severity and Frequency hegemonic

S/N	Causes of Conflicts	Severity of Conflict	Frequency of Conflict	Remark
1.	Leadership and power tussles	Low	Low	Resolved by community leadership and sometimes through the legal process of courts
2.	Conflict over oil company social responsibility governance issues	Low	Low	Oil companies use security agencies to suppress conflicts
3.	Youth restiveness leading to conflicts	Low	Low	Security committee set up to manage conflict issues generally
4.	Cult related conflicts	Low	Low	Cultism has been prohibited and a security committee set up to manage monitor cult activities
5.	Boundary disputes	Low	Low	Community leadership resolves such disputes. Criminal cases are handed over to the police
6.	Militancy, Piracy	High	High	Residents/Travelers are constantly in fear of being attacked by pirates and kidnapers.
7.	Bunkering/Artisanal refining and associated conflicts	Low	Low	The community has a lot of non-natives suspected to be involved in Bunkering/Artisanal refining and sometimes conflicts erupts among them and with farmers and fishermen.

General Observation and Lessons Learnt

Observations

- The environment is swampy and might be suitable for rice farming.
- Interest in agricultural livelihood has dropped particularly among the youth, due to poor income earning opportunities in agriculture
- The youth collect some sort of tariff from sand miners who are allowed to excavate sand at the sea shore for sales.
- Jobs offered by oil companies are the main sources of livelihood in the community
- There are incidents of high drug abuse by the youth in the community.
- There is tension in the community as a result of the crisis between the Ilaje fisher folk and indigenes of Inua Eyet Ikot community.

Lessons Learnt

- The Ibeno Environmental Club, was initiated by concerned community members and membership is voluntary. It cuts across most communities in the Local Government Area.
- The community leadership is skeptical about the fulfilment of AAPW intervention as explained to them due to disappointments by NGOs in past.

Recommendations for Intervention

- Build a strong synergy between the Ibeno Environmental Club and Community Stakeholders Network to start mobilization and sensitization of communities on climate change adaptation, resilience and conflict management.
- Communities should be trained to engage oil companies and government to adopt and implement collaborative climate resilience initiatives in Communities
- A community development model where conflict sensitive climate change intervention and development approach is integrated into community governance system.
- Training of community leadership on the provisions of the Petroleum Industry Act and its prospects should be conducted.
- Find out best approaches to boat security management and devices that can be installed on boats and engines for tracking.
- Establishment of a community business support and development hub to strengthen local businesses and enhance socio-economic activities.
- Training on Networking and Collaboration of CSNs in all 10 communities and Fisherfolks across coastal fishing communities for CSNs to facilitate.

Conclusion

Inua Eyet Ikot, Ogulagha, Ogidigben, Akassa, share similar environmental characteristics and are all located at the bight of the Atlantic Ocean, it is therefore, important to establish a network of fisher folks in these communities. In addition, the conflict over fishing method between Ilaje and indigenous people is an issue that was reported by other communities. In Akassa, it was reported that conflict ensued in the sea that resulted into the loss of lives and properties (fishing boats and gears were destroyed). It is important to do further analysis of the conflict and find solution to the issue. Identification of local community economic potentials and harnessing them for income generation activities is fundamental to addressing the climate change issues in Inua Eyet Ikot Community.

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