



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

**Okoroete & Iko Community in Eastern Obolo LGA,
Akwa Ibom State. Nigeria.**

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Picture Showing How Rise in Sea Level and Sea Surge Washed Away Vegetation in Edowin Community in Iko Clan, Eastern Obolo LGA. That tree has been standing for over twenty years.

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List of Abbreviations

AAPW	Academic Associates PeaceWorks
CC	Climate Change
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
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company
WANEP	West African Network for Peacebuilding

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 Geographical Location

Okoroete is the headquarters of Eastern Obolo Local Government Area. The Local Government comprises two clans, namely: Okoroete and Iko Clans. It is a coastal area in Akwa Ibom State, created in December 1996 from Ikot Abasi Local Government due to the distinct language the people speak. They are of the Obolo ethnic group of Ijaw and have ancestral lineage with Ijaws.

Eastern Obolo is located at the junction between Imo and Qua Iboe Rivers estuaries and lie between latitudes 4° 28' and 4° 53' and longitudes 7° 50' and 7° 55' East. It is bound on the north by Mkpato Enin Local Government Area, northeast by Onna, west by Ikot Abasi, southeast by Ibeno Local Government and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean.

Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Context

The people of Eastern Obolo are a combination of Obolo ethnic group and Iko extractions; strong cultural affinity exists among the people. They have historical relation with a number of tribes within the Niger Delta. The community population is predominantly the Obolos (95%), Ibibio and Ibo Iko? Consistency. See paragraph above make up the remaining population. Thus, their culture can be described as mixed. It is stated in Wikipedia that the Obolo people occupy the longest stretch of the Niger Delta Mangroves belt, which also houses the largest oil and gas deposits in the Gulf of Guinea. The people

occupy a total land area of approximately 117,008 square kilometers with an estimated shoreline about 184 km long, comprising several villages and ten political wards.

Eastern Obolo people are traders and predominantly fishermen, with over 65 per cent involved in active fishing. They speak Obolo and Iko languages which are mutually intelligible. Eastern Obolo has abundant mineral deposits with onshore and offshore oil wells at Elek-Okpooñ, Iko, Otunene, Emeroke, Ikonta and Obianga. There are fishing settlements at Educwink, Elek-Okpooñ, Agan-asa. Other economic potentials are in their Forest reserves that have tress such as iroko, raffia, rubber, kolanut, coconut, peas, and mango, as well as a wide span of mangrove etc.

Okoroete and Iko Clan Governance System

Eastern Obolo has a similar Governance Structure with Ibeno. The Paramount ruler, is the overall traditional head in the Local Government, followed by the Clan Heads, who constitute the clan council. The clan heads are usually elected by the Village heads, who are the next level of leaders. The villages heads have under them the Family Heads. The youth group comprising both males and females as well as the Women Group. Age Grades. Social Cultural Groups and Religious Groups also play some crucial roles in the governance system.

Gender Equality

There is a significant improvement in women participation in governance. However, patriarchy has become endemic in the Niger Delta, thus, it will require a long time to have the expected level of women inclusion in the final decision making process. Like other Niger Delta communities, women are recognized as part of the governance system in Eastern Obolo, but they operate in their associations to take decisions that are approved by the men in who are at the helms of leadership in the community. Women are also part of the youth groups and some socio-cultural groups. However, there are some socio-cultural groups that strictly alienates women from being members.

Okoroete & Iko Community Institutions, Governance and Functions

S/ No	Institution	Functions
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 • Represent 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 • Represent 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"> • Implementing instructions from higher traditional authorities • Organize youth programs. • Organize provide community labour, execution of community projects etc. • In charge of community security • Organize recreational and 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

The people of Eastern Obolo stated that they had an ecosystem that has a rich biodiversity and wildlife population before oil exploration. The dense rain forest that is connected to the mangroves forest, providing a good environment for amphibious animals, the saline water environment with creeks and canals linked to the Atlantic Ocean, making it a suitable

breeding ground for various species of fish and other marine lives. “We were endowed with natural resources that defined our occupation as fishermen and farmers”. A fisherman said.

The rainfall is heavy, almost all through the year with a short dry season. The seasons offers the people with different kind of livelihood activities. For fishermen, the seasons determine the kind of fish caught. However, the major devastating vulnerability according to them, is coastal flooding associated with coastal erosion due to rise in sea level, sea surge and increase in unpredictable rainfall pattern. The picture on the second page of this documents shows how coastal areas in Edowin community in Iko Clan of Eastern Obolo, have lost a wide expanse of land and vegetation to coastal erosion. According to them, it is a mystery, why that particular tree has been standing over twenty years ago. There were other bigger trees, houses and so on, but that particular tree has been standing.

Fisherfolk in the community have started migrating to other areas as a result of low productivity due to poor fish catch; limited farmlands; and the high rate of unemployment. According to the people, some youths have taken up jobs with the state government coconut plantation project; called St. Gabriel Coconut Plantation Project. It’s an initiative of the government to produce by-products of coconut, such as coconut oil and other associated products. The coconut plantation covers several hectares of land crisscrossing Mkpato-Enin, Eastern Obolo and Ikot Abasi local government areas respectively. The workers, are not certain of the actual size of the coconut plantation.

As at the time of AAPW visit to communities in Eastern Obolo, at Edowin and Elekpon which are mainly fishing communities, there were a number of fishing boats and nets at the water fronts. When asked, if the fishing season is bad, the people complained that;

- They cannot predict the fishing season any more due to unpredictability of the climate
- The tide is high and with very turbulent sea at a time that it is expected to be calm for them to sail into the deep sea for fishing
- The wind and storms have become very consistent and does not give



Picture showing fishing boats, colour of water and a fisherman

room for fishing activity in the deep sea, which is the only area they can have reasonable quantity of fish catch

- The issue of pirates had become worrisome, as fishermen are attacked on daily basis and they are robbed of their engines, fishing gear and other belongings
- They also complained about some unknown sea weeds all over the bed of the sea that destroy their nets. The same complaint was made by Ogidigben, Ogulagha, Akasaa and Ibeno communities during our community entry and stakeholders mapping.
- Rise in temperature resulting in heat during the day and night was also mentioned as a climatic challenge

As a result of the above, they are facing severe environmental and climatic challenges. According to them climate change has affected the source of their livelihood. Periwinkles, which used to be a source of income for the women as well as sea food for the family is in extinction. The continental shelf of the sea, used to be the breeding ground for some fish and the fingerlings which attract bigger fishes that feed on the smaller fish and during fish breeding season, they used to have good catch. This no longer happens as most fish have either migrated from the area or are also in extinction.

The oil companies, which are now indigenous have also caused severe damage to the water body and the mangrove. The colour of the inland water is appearing black and there is no sign of living thing in the water. Thus, inland fishing has completely stopped. Which is more of a greater challenge as everybody now depends on deep sea fishing, that is unpredictable. According to one of the speakers, “we have lost so many people in the sea, who had boat mishap and died. Some of them were rescued by other fishermen. The pirates can take your engine in the middle of the sea and you are left at the instance of the sea. If you are lucky to meet other fishermen, then you can be rescued; otherwise, you starve to death or the turbulence will consume you” Some of them have become hopeless and have resorted to crime: Artisanal refining, bunkering, piracy etc.

Livelihood Systems and Analysis

The livelihoods in Eastern Obolo are basically fishing and farming. There are other livelihood activities such as trading, skill based apprenticeship jobs etc.

Fishing: Fishing is the major occupation of the people, they have an organized system, where the men engage more in deep sea fishing with a few women who fish around the creeks but, the women are mainly involved in fish processing and trading. Some of the women, mostly the elderly, are involved in weaving fish storage and processing baskets. According to them, the fishing industry in the area was well organized along the value chain. Those who go out into the sea to catch fish, community fish traders, fish processors and foreigners who travel to Eastern Obolo on market days to buy fish. The local economy was active. Unfortunately, the changes in climate combined with crude oil pollution in the area has severely affected the fishing business and rendered most persons in the value chain unproductive.

Farming: Farming, according to them is a complementary livelihood. Low proportion of the community is involved in subsistence farming which is also threatened by oil pollution in the area.

Forest Livelihood Sources: Very few persons are involved in hunting as an occupation presently as it is no longer profitable. Snail harvesting, was a good business and most indigenous women travel from far and near during rainy season, which is the period that has high snail harvest, to either buy or undertake in snail harvesting. Non-timber resources such as herbs and shrubs were described as alternative sources of livelihood to some who are traditional medicine practitioners. The complaint is that, most herbs and shrubs are no longer found in the area, which has led to the termination of such practices in the community.

Non-Agricultural Livelihood System

High level of livelihood changes was reported in the area, with more persons in the petroleum industry. As has been noted above, the traditional occupations of the vast majority of the inhabitants in Okoroete and Iko clans were farming and fishing, but the trend had shifted over the years majorly as a result of loss of biodiversity and ecological devastation that is associated with the activities of oil companies and oil pollution in the area.

The people are made to depend almost entirely on alternatives livelihoods from the oil companies and other private venture.

Challenges of Livelihood Systems

- Reduction in fish population, resulting to poor catch and ultimately loss of livelihood
- Depletion of forest resources, some plants and animals are at risk of extinction
- High incidences of crude oil spill
- Discharge of waste products into the sea by suspected agencies of oil companies
- Increase in social vices and crimes: Militancy, kidnapping, sea robbery and piracy, rape, stealing, and other crimes
- Drug Abuse, cultism and conflicts associated with oil company politics
- Increase in piracy and kidnapping
- Conflicts associated with oil company 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	Various adaptations; 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.

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 kidnappers.
7.	Bunkering/Artisanal refining and associated conflicts	High	High	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 Observations and Lessons Learnt

Observations

- Youth are not interested in agricultural livelihood due to the poor income earning opportunities in agriculture
- Jobs offered by oil companies are the main sources of livelihood
- Militancy and piracy are high in the sea within the waterways, while kidnapping is more along the road.

Lessons Learnt

- The people have lost hope and need urgent intervention
- The community is skeptical about interventions of NGOs due to legacy issues
- The leadership of Eastern Obolo is keen on participating and recommending names for the CSN. Thus they requested AAPW to hold a leadership meeting for further discussion on the project.

Recommendations for Intervention

- Sensitization of communities on climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience and conflict management:
- Advocate for collaboration with local, state and federal government to review and or formulate policies and laws on environmental protection and management marine economy and conservation of environment.
- Lobby and advocate for establishment of climate change departments in Local Government Administration to work with community environmental monitors for data collation, reporting, policy formulation and intervention.
- Local governments departments on environment and their state counterparts directly involved in climate change issues should be trained on conflict-sensitive climate change mitigation, adaptation and strategies that will be suitable to the Niger Delta.
- Training on security management such as installation and tracking devices on engines and boats

- Training and establishment of micro credit scheme for women to enhance socio-economic activities.
- Establish a Network of fisher folk in collaboration with the CSNs across coastal fishing communities.
- Sensitize community leadership and CNSs on the provisions of the Petroleum Industry Act, particularly, on the community governance section of the Act.

Conclusion

The people of Eastern Obolo depends more on the environment for their livelihood, mostly in areas of farming, fishing and other small-scale trade. These activities are highly threatened by oil and gas exploration and exploitation. The environment is continuously compromised, crude oil pollution, canalization, blocking of natural creeks, deforestation due to petroleum infrastructure installations as well as pipeline routes with restricted areas and so on. The people are deprived from accessing the environment to practice their traditional livelihood. In addition to these challenge, is the global phenomenon of climate change. Which has further caused the depletion of their livelihood. This C7-WA project, is therefore, very timely and requires urgent implementation to forestall likely collapse of Niger Delta communities in terms of overwhelming conflict, etc.

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