



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



Community Entry and Stakeholders Mapping Report

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for

**Akassa Communities in Brass LGA,
Bayelsa State. Nigeria.**

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Picture Showing How Rise in Sea Level and Sea Surge Washed Away Residential Houses in Akassa. Click on link below for more Details.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction.....	5
Brief History and Location	5
Geographical Location.....	6
Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Context.....	6
Akassa Kingdom Governance System.....	6
Gender Equality.....	7
Environmental and Climatic Characteristics	8
Climatic Conditions:.....	8
Flood and Erosion.....	9
Erosion.....	9
Heat	9
Livelihood Systems and Analysis	10
Fishing	10
Farming	10
Forest Livelihood	10
Non-Agricultural Livelihood System	10
Challenges of Livelihood Systems.....	11
Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis	11
Causes of Conflicts, Severity and Frequency hegemonic.....	12
General Observation and Lessons Learnt	13
Observations	13
Lessons Learnt.....	13
Recommendations for Intervention.....	13
Conclusion	14

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List of Abbreviations

AAPW	Academic Associates PeaceWorks
ADP	Agricultural Development Program
ADF	Akassa Development Foundation
ANYA	Akassa National Youths Association
CC	Climate Change
CDP	Community Development Plan
CDC	Community Development Committee
CSN	Community Stakeholders Network
DPO	Divisional Police Officer
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
NAOC	Nigerian Agip Oil Company
RDA	Rural Development Authority
RNC	Royal Niger Company
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company
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 by AAPW of a Community Stakeholders Network, constituted of highly influential community stakeholders. 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

Akassa is a sub-ethnic nationality within the major Ijaw ethnic nationality in the core Niger Delta. According to the people, Akassa was founded as one of 5 ancient deltaic city states by Lah from Kassama in Apoi Clan of present Southern Ijaw. Akassa has a prominent pre-colonial history with the Royal Niger Company in Brass. It was a slave-trading post and customary headquarters of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) established by Charter in 1886. Akassa was famed for its palm oil and kernel trade. Trade monopoly by RNC led to conflict between the locals (Brass men) and the British traders; this resulted in the Nembe and British War, popularly known as Akassa Raid of 1895.

Akassa historical relics include: the old UAC factory, Portuguese slave depot, British cemetery, lighthouse, wrecked steamships, truck rails, harbour wharf, engineering/marine base, warehouses, flagpole, anchors, cannons, etc. This history should be preserved.

Geographical Location

Akassa is a coastal territory that falls within latitudes 4o2`N and 4o4`N and longitudes 6o20`E and 4o40`E; covering about 450 sq. km. consisting three sandy ridge barrier islands, forestlands, 320 sq. km mangrove swamps, 60 sq. km rivers, streams, and creeks.

Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Context

The coastal people of Akassa Kingdom share similar experience with other minority groups in terms of marginalization and underdevelopment which have characterized the oil-rich Niger Delta. However, the people recognized their disadvantaged position and resorted to embrace opportunities for an organized community development strategy that established the Akassa Development Foundation by Pro Natura International with supports from Statoil, a Norwegian oil company operating off the shores of Akassa. ADF is a corporate Community Based Organization (CBO) initiated to pioneer an integrated community development programme – The Akassa participatory model.

The people of Akassa exhibit typical Ijaw culture: masquerade (owu) displays, traditional dances (bou`hegi, akaraigbe, ojolo, etc.), traditional religious festivals, wrestling and swimming contests, marriage rites, funerals and birthday ceremonies, etc. The local people are predominantly Christians with a few traditional religion worshippers. In recent times, the practices of Islamic religion by the Hausas and Fulanis from northern Nigeria have been established.

The major occupation or livelihood of the coastal people of Akassa kingdom is fishing. The people do creek, river and deep sea fishing. Creek and river fishing is done by both men and women, while deep sea fishing is predominantly men's occupation. Other livelihood options include canoe carving, basket weaving, local hat making, bread baking, rice farming, cassava cultivation, vegetable gardening, trading and transportation.

The proximity of Akassa to the Atlantic Ocean, has made it a traditional trading site in Nigeria, which was the reason the British considered it during the colonial years and made Akassa an outpost of the Royal Niger Company.

Akassa Kingdom Governance System

Akassa Kingdom comprises 19 major towns and villages and over 120 satellite settlements in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It has a population of 180,000 coastal people (predominately women and youths). About 50% of the population inhabits the three major towns of Sangana, Kongho (also called Erewei-Kongho) and Minibie. The other 50% is distributed unevenly among the remaining 16 villages. The 19 towns and villages are; Apparanbie, Bekekiri, Buoama, Ereweibie, Fishtown (Ohoniweitoru), Hununu, Itohono-ama, Kolobie, Kongho, Kotikiri (Bein-ama), Miniamgba (Tobukiri), Minibeleu, Minibie, Ogbokiri, Oginibiri, Okumbiribeleu, Opu-Okumbiri (Igberiongu), Otuo and Sangana.

Like other kingdoms, there is a central and overall King addressed as His Eminence, while each community also has a sub king, referred to as Royal Highness. The overall king and his subordinates at the community level form the Traditional Ruling Council.

Compounds or units in each community has a unit head who is the head chief as well as family chiefs making up the compounds. There is the Kingdom based Chiefs Council, called the Akassa clan council of chiefs as well as the community council of chiefs. Other smaller administrative units of the governance system of Akassa include; the community Development Council, the youth and women executives' bodies. As well as the Akassa National Youths Association (ANYA).

The Akassa Development Foundation, has become part of the governance system of Akassa and operates like the hub of development planning and intervention with Community, Clan and Kingdom based development plans and projects.

Gender Equality

Patriarchy is a general phenomenon in the Niger Delta, However, women are involved in leadership processes but few decision making roles. Women are not made chiefs in Akassa. However, with the advent of The Akassa Development Foundation, efforts have been made to make women part of the decision making process and this has resulted in remarkable inclusiveness of women in the decision making process of the community.

S/ No	Institution	Functions
Governance System and Functions at Kingdom and Community Level		
1.	The King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Custodian of law, custom and tradition ▪ Strengthens community peace and stability. ▪ Mediates disputes and facilitates resolutions ▪ Promotes development by engaging with development partners
2.	Akassa Clan Council of Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists the King in his functions as directed by the King • Represents the community in traditional functions • Conflict resolution • Decision making
3.	Community Council of Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports and represents the Chiefs in traditional functions if directed • Represents the community in traditional functions • Conflict resolution • Decision making
4.	Community Development Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiates community developmental projects and activities. ▪ Coordinates with donor agencies for the smooth execution and completion of community projects. ▪ Finds employment opportunities for youths.
5.	Youth Executives Male and Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement instructions from higher traditional authorities • Organize youth programs. • Organize and provide community labour, execution of community projects etc. • In charge of community Security Provide??? community

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize recreational and community entertainment programs etc.
6.	Women Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizes women development programs. ▪ Implements instructions and decisions from higher authorities ▪ Funds and implements community development projects ▪ Conflict resolution
7.	Female Youth Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizes female development programs. ▪ Implements instructions and decisions from higher authorities ▪ Funds and implements 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
10.	Traditional 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

Akassa, through its Development Foundation initiated a Coastal Conservation Project. The people resolved to protect the sea turtle that was reported as an endangered species that migrates all the way from Scandinavia to breed in the seashore of Akassa. With support from IUCN, ADF was able to stop the killing of sea turtle. ADF is currently developing a mini-ecotourism Centre.

Akassa is an Island and the landscape is below sea level. It is at the bight of the Atlantic Ocean, thus it experiences high level of sea surge, erosion and flooding from the high tide. The wind is very high. Precipitation was said to be almost round the year with wet and hot seasons. According to the people, rainfall is highly unpredictable. The weather condition is cloudy and stormy, particularly during the rainy season. The temperature is also high.

Climatic Conditions: The climate here is tropical. Akassa experiences significant rainfall during most part of the year. There is only a short dry season. The temperature

here averages 26.4 °C | 79.5 °F. The rainfall here is around 2320 mm | 91.3 inch per year.

Source: <https://en.climate-data.org/africa/nigeria/bayelsa-318/>

Flood and Erosion

Flood has become a common occurrence in Akassa and has caused hazards responsible



Picture showing swamp due to flood

for greater number of fatalities. According to the people, flood in the area has caused, destroyed properties, ???infrastructure, businesses and has increased the risk of water borne diseases in the area.

Flood has become very frequent during the year in Akassa, affecting the local economy of the communities. It has displaced many and created conflict over land as people affected with flood scramble for available land.

There is a fast reduction of fishing activities due to insecurity, unpredictable weather condition (storm, wind, rainfall). Many fishermen experience boat mishap at sea, die of starvation or miss their way and arrive in other West African countries if they are not rescued by other fishing boats or international vessels. As a result, the fishermen are afraid to continue fishing.

Erosion in Akassa was attributed to the **rise in sea level, sea surge and heavy rainfall**. At short intervals, residential houses close to the sea are washed away. A community respondent, when asked, why they built their houses close to the sea, given the threat they face? He responded; “In the past, we don’t experience houses being washed away by the sea, what we used to experience, is that, in some seasons, the sand bank at the sea shore will be washed away and by the next season, even more sand will be deposited than washed away. So, we were rather experiencing yearly increase of sand bank. There was no fear of houses being washed away, but even my house that is some feet away, will be affected soon”.

Heat: Heat in another major climate change that is mentioned. While there is rain fall almost round the year, the temperature and heat level have considerably increased. Akassa used to experience rainy and dry seasons. According to them, rainy season comes with a cold temperature which helps in reducing the temperature. However, presently, the temperature is high during the dry season and the rainy season. Heat wave during the day is high and made worse by the wind that blows in the communities.

In summary, environmental and climatic issues have caused deleterious challenges to the existence of people in Akassa. There are complaints of health challenges as a result

of climate change impacts, increasing livelihood depletion and a corresponding increase in crime, insecurity and conflict. Fishermen and farmers who lose their livelihoods, are easily tempted to either join pirate gangs or become involved in bunkering and artisanal refining. As people lose their livelihoods, food production is threatened, income generation becomes unrealistic, poverty deepens and people take to the creed of 'survival of the fittest'.

Livelihood Systems and Analysis

Akassa is a settlement at the southernmost tip of Nigeria in Bayelsa state where the Nun River estuary meets the Atlantic Ocean. It is in the heart of the Niger Delta. The habitation in the region is sandwiched between salt and brackish water of mangrove swamps and most locals make their living from fishing and small scale trading. There are no good roads or electricity, poor health and educational facilities, and people do not have access to clean water. Livelihood in the area can best be described as agricultural and non-agricultural.

Fishing: Fishing is traditionally the highest and major occupation of the people of Akassa. They are situated in a strategic location that makes them great in fishing. They have access to creeks, rivers coastal and deep sea. They are good at deep sea fishing. Dolphin, Barracuda, Red Sniper, Catfish, Electric Fish, whale, shark, Herring, Mullet, sardine, etc. are some of the fish caught.

A respondent said, they used to enjoy abundance of sea food, such as oysters, crabs, periwinkles, lobsters, clams, octopus, shrimp, squid, etc. According to the people these have extremely reduced. It is suspected that some sea foods and fish species are already extinct.

Farming: Farming is not a major occupation in Akassa. Nonnatives are mostly the farmers. Though, the ADF has initiated rice farming in the mangrove swamp of Akassa and it has attracted most persons, particularly the natives. However, the challenge of crude oil spill and pollution of farms caused by equipment failures on the part of the oil companies, bunkering and artisanal refining activities, have affected many farms and investments loss of farmers. This has hindered the growth of rice farming in the area.

Forest Livelihood: Hunting is a traditional practice, "we spend our leisure time hunting at times", a responded said. Other forest resources such as snail harvesting, cutting and sales of bamboo for weaving and construction of houses, as well as thatch making, herbal plant and shrubs for local food preparation used to be other sources of livelihood in Akassa. However, most forest livelihood sources have reduced and are no longer lucrative. Other livelihoods options include canoe carving, basket weaving, local hat making, bread baking, rice farming, cassava cultivation, vegetable gardening etc.

Non-Agricultural Livelihood System

Trading and transportation are the major non-agricultural livelihood activities. There is also skilled work for construction jobs. Electrical, plumbing, pipe fitting, carpenters, welding, bricklaying, local craft/artisans, tailors, etc. are some of the non-agricultural livelihood activities in the Akassa.

Challenges of Livelihood Systems

Agriculture is the main livelihood occupation of the people of Akassa, Today, climate change and oil exploration and exploitation activities have impacted negatively on the environment and have altered their livelihood system. Some of the challenges the people experience include:

- Some plants and animals are at the risk of extinction
- Rise in sea level, sea surge and flood
- Unpredictable and heavy rain falls, thunder and storms
- Temperature Increase (Heat and Cold)
- Increase in diseases and health issues
- High cost of food and materials, particularly for their livelihood
- Crude oil spill and the use of chemicals by suspected agencies of oil companies to dissolve spilled crude oil in the river
- Increase in social vices and crimes: piracy, kidnapping, rape, stealing, internet fraud and other crimes
- Drug Abuse, cultism and conflicts associated with oil company politics

Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis

Climate Change 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	Sand and mud filling of flood area, abandonment of flooded areas.
	Loss of Farm lands	Land disputes	Migration to other communities where land is available for farming. Resort to alternative livelihood opportunities
		Land disputes	Sharing of available high land to farming members of families
	Loss of fishing ground	Conflict over fishing areas.	Change of fishing strategies and patterns which sometimes create further conflict due to the fishing technique.
Pollution of surface water sources for drinking e.g. well water sources	No dispute reported		Use of rain water for drinking and other domestic needs

Unpredictable and heavy rain falls, thunder and storms	Erosion of top soil causing infertility of soil	No dispute reported	Appears to be a blessing in disguise as community depend on rain water for drinking and other domestic services. However, community perceives it as an act of God.
Temperature Increase (Heat and Cold)	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 vary 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	Moderate	Moderate	Resolved by community leadership and sometimes through the legal process of courts
2.	Intra community conflict over traditional leadership right	Low	Low	Community leadership resolves such disputes. Criminal cases are handed over to the police
3.	Conflict over oil company social responsibility governance issues	Low	Low	Oil companies use security agencies to suppress conflicts
4.	Youth restiveness leading to conflicts	Low	Low	Security committee set up to manage conflict issues generally
5.	Cult related conflicts	Low	Low	Cultism has been prohibited and a security committee set up to manage monitor cult activities
6.	Boundary disputes	Low	Low	Community leadership resolves such disputes. Criminal cases are handed over to the police
7.	Militancy, Piracy	High	High	Residents/Travelers are constantly in fear of being attacked by pirates and kidnappers.

8.	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 erupt among them and with farmers and fishermen.
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General Observation and Lessons Learnt

Observations

- Youth are not interested in agricultural livelihood due to the poor income earning opportunities in agriculture
- Bunkering, artisanal refining and other related jobs like transportation of bunkering/artisanal refining products have become the main source of youth employment in Akassan for indigenes and people from outside the area.
- Militancy, Piracy and kidnapping is high within the waterways of Akassa. People are constantly in fear.

Lessons Learnt

- Akassa Development Foundation has become a community governance system and integrated into the leadership and governance structure of Akassa Kingdom.
- ADF has a project it has initiated on climate change and environment.
- Communities are not open to any conversation if ADF members are not in support or participating in the activity.

Recommendations for Intervention

- Training on climate change adaptation, resilience and conflict management: Mainstreaming climate change adaptation and resilience mechanism into community governance system.
- Training on conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies
- Training on the importance and benefits of environmental conservation and management.
- Training on conflict prevention, management and resolution
- 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.
- Leadership training and community development principles
- Training on Networking and Collaboration of CSNs in all 10 communities and Fisherfolks across coastal fishing communities for CSNs to facilitate.

- Training of community leadership on the provisions of the Petroleum Industry Act, particularly concerns over the state government setting up of the trust funds and the administration of PIA funds.
- Communities should be engaged by government and oil companies on their challenges.

Conclusion

Akassa Kingdom is strategic because of its location. If a good security system is established involving communities in Akassa, it will curb piracy and other criminal vices, and strengthen the general security in the area. ADF has initiated Mangrove rice farming and production in the area. It is an initiative that should be studied and replicated as an alternative agricultural intervention in the coastal areas of Niger Delta.

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