



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



## **Community Entry and Stakeholders Mapping Report**

Prepared by

### **Academic Associates PeaceWorks**

Godson Jim-Dorgu, Tega Edeki and Ken Omavuayenor

[www.aapw.org](http://www.aapw.org)

for

**Agbakabiriyai, Etieama & Igbetaewoama  
Community in Nembe LGA,  
Bayelsa State. Nigeria.**

**April 4, 2022.**



**Funded by The European Union**



**Picture Showing How Flood Transformed Farmland into Swamp in Eteama Community Nembe Kingdom**

## Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations .....	4
Introduction.....	5
Brief History and Location .....	5
Socio-Economic and Political Context .....	5
Nembe Kingdom Governance System.....	6
Gender Equality .....	7
Table Showing Governance System and Functions.....	7
Environmental and Climatic Characteristics .....	8
Livelihood Systems and Analysis .....	10
Agricultural Livelihoods.....	10
Non - Agricultural Livelihood .....	11
Challenges of Livelihood Systems .....	12
Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis .....	12
Causes of Conflicts, Severity and Frequency .....	13
General Observation and Lessons Learnt .....	14
Recommendations for Intervention.....	14
Conclusion .....	15

### **Disclaimer!**

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Academic Associates PeaceWorks and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

## List of Abbreviations

AAPW .....	<b>ACADEMIC ASSOCIATES PEACEWORKS</b>
ADP.....	Agricultural Development Program
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
GMoU .....	Global Memorandum of Understanding
HOMEF.....	Health of Mother Earth Foundation
LGA .....	Local Government Area
LGC.....	Local Government Council
NAOC .....	1 Nigerian Agip Oil Company
SPDC.....	1 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 with 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’s targeted communities in the Niger Delta through a small scale grant scheme.

## **Brief History and Location**

Etiema, Agbakabiriyai and Igbetaewoama are communities in Nembe Kingdom. The settlements are within and around the Edumanom Forest Reserve, the home to special breeds of chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys and several other animals in the Niger Delta. Nembe is located within the geographical coordinates 4° 32' 23" North, 6° 24' 7" East.

## **Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Context**

The people of Nembe in general, have a very rich culture and traditional belief. They also have a rich environmental conservation culture. For instance, there are prohibitions and regulations that stop people from going into certain mangrove forests for any livelihood activity, fishing, farming etc. People are by native law forbidden to fish in certain creeks, canals and rivers or farm in certain forests. In some areas, the law specifies certain days of the week, that livelihood activities must not take place. The consequence of disobedience used to be spiritual and physical illness that require the person to conduct rituals for cleansing. It is also against the law to catch very small fishes (fingerlings) during fishing. Indigenous fisherfolks are required by law to put back fingerlings into the river. etc. Certain species of fish and crabs are also forbidden. Regrettably, it was said, that, due to livelihood depletion, poverty and hunger as a result of climate change impact, these laws and prohibitions are no longer obeyed. Hunters, farmers, fishermen and women etc. presently, go to these forests for their survival. They

said, such conserved areas are the only areas that have rich resources that have unfortunately reduced tremendously, since they starting entering such areas for livelihood. The only standing rule, according to them is the periwinkle conservation. The law forbidding the selling of periwinkle is very strong. Thus, within the Nembe territory, periwinkles are still found in relatively high quantities. Unfortunately, now nonnatives, due to the extinction of periwinkle in their own areas, travel to Nembe territories to harvest periwinkles and this has caused very violent conflict between the indigenes and nonindigenes. The Police in Nembe, has intervened in conflicts over periwinkle harvesting for sale by nonnatives and had instructed that communities should arrest such persons and hand them over to the Police.

Nembe also has several festivals, that are mostly celebrated for general clean up (sanitation) of the community to dispel evil attacks, cleanse the land, and boost increased fish catch harvest for fisher folks and farmers respectively. Festivals are mostly celebrated in January or December of every year. During the festival season, fishes caught and farm produce harvested are shared to people for free.

The people of Etiema, Agbakabiriyai and Igbetaewoama are of the view that, economic activities in Nembe are linked to their culture and tradition. They are known for their fishing, farming and hunting prowess. They take advantage of the huge forest, creeks, canals and rivers, which were said to be very good breeding ground for fishes and serve as habitat to several other aquatic resources. The mangrove and fresh water forest intersect, providing a good vegetation for animals. Thus, their livelihood and economic activities revolve round the natural endowments of the environment, as a result, there were several regulations guiding livelihood activities. A popular fishing regulation, which has since stopped, was placing a ban to fishing activity in some creeks and rivers until the fishing season is over. The ban, is usually lifted on an agreed date and all fisher folks are expected to fish in those areas for a period; people exchange fish for food as well as share to friends and relatives. Similarly, there are also hunting seasons. Hunters are by law not allowed to hunt after the hunting season.

According to the people, the advent of oil exploration and most recently the impact of climate change have made many to disregard these natural resources conservation laws. Today, there are conflicts among the people between those who hold on to the traditional laws and others who disregard such laws. Supplementary economic activities in Nembe include artisans, petty trading, weaving, lumbering, trading etc.

SPDC and NAOC also operate in the area and provide short term skilled and unskilled jobs such as welding, pipe fitting, plumbing, painting, catering, security services etc.

### **Nembe Kingdom Governance System**

The Kingdom of Nembe operates a Monarchical System of Governance. With the King (Mingi) being the supreme Authority of the people. He is described as the owner of the land, water and the people. All resources belong to him. Nembe has 14 War Canoe Chieftaincy Houses. Each of the 14 Houses has a head chief under whom several chiefs are appointed to lead the various families within the War Canoe House. Though Nembe has over 150 chiefs, each of them falls under the administration of the 14 Head Chiefs. Each of the satellite communities like Etiema, Agbakabiriyai and Igbetaewoama has a sub king appointed by the Overall King (Mingi). The sub kings in turn have a small

Council of Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs, Elders, Youth Leadership, Community Development Committee members, Women Leadership, Security Committee and Socio-Cultural Groups. Similar to the overall Nembe Governance System. Nevertheless, the leadership structure at the satellite community level is subservient to the Mingi, the overall King of the Nembe people and his Governance Structure.

### Gender Equality

Nembe is a very patriarchal society. Women are not made chiefs and the decision making process is dominated by men. However, the women are treated as king mothers. Nembe is matrilineal, thus, a man can become a chief in either his mother or father's family. Most chiefs are bearing chieftaincy titles of their mother's family.

S/ No	Institution	Functions
<b>Governance System and Functions at Kingdom and Community Level</b>		
1.	The King	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Custodian of law, custom and tradition</li> <li>▪ Strengthens community peace and stability.</li> <li>▪ Mediates of disputes and facilitates resolutions</li> <li>▪ Promotes development by engaging with development partners</li> </ul>
2.	Chiefs Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assists the King in his functions as directed by the King</li> <li>• Represents the community in traditional functions</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul>
3.	Deputy Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and Represent the Chiefs in traditional functions if directed</li> <li>• Represent the community in traditional functions</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul>
4.	Elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory role</li> </ul>
5.	Opuasawo Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory role</li> </ul>
6.	Nembe Kingdom Youth Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement instructions from higher traditional authorities</li> <li>• Organize youth programs.</li> <li>• Organize provide community labour, execution of community projects etc.</li> <li>• In charge of community security</li> <li>• Organize recreational and community entertainment programs etc.</li> </ul>
7.	Community Development Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initiate community developmental projects and activities.</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with donor agencies for the smooth execution and completion of community projects.</li> <li>▪ Find employment opportunities for youths.</li> </ul>
8.	Women Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organize women development programs.</li> <li>▪ Implement instructions and decisions from higher authorities</li> <li>▪ Fund and implement community development projects</li> <li>▪ Conflict resolution</li> </ul>



9.	Female Youth Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organize female development programs.</li> <li>▪ Implement instructions and decisions from higher authorities</li> <li>▪ Fund and implement community development projects</li> <li>▪ Conflict resolution</li> </ul>
10.	Social/Cultural Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organize social functions (burial ceremonies, special coronations)</li> <li>▪ Promote the tradition and culture of the people</li> <li>▪ Settle disputes when the need arises</li> <li>▪ Provide support and funds to educational and economic activities</li> <li>▪ Involve in community development efforts (donation of small facilities like chairs, tables, canopies)</li> </ul>
11.	Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prayers for peace and stability</li> <li>▪ Role models</li> <li>▪ Advisory roles</li> <li>▪ Spiritual/divine healings</li> <li>▪ Support community development efforts</li> </ul>
12.	Traditional Religious Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prayers for peace and stability</li> <li>▪ Role models</li> <li>▪ Advisory roles</li> <li>▪ Spiritual/divine healings</li> <li>▪ Support community development efforts</li> </ul>

## **Environmental and Climatic Characteristics**

Nembe is characterized by fresh and brackish-water ecological zones with the brackish and mangrove soils spanning its vegetation. The topography is said to be generally below sea level. It has a six hourly flow and ebb tide which determines the movement of fish and animals in search of food. Nembe experiences wet and hot seasons. According to the people, the temperature is relatively high, weather condition is cloudy and stormy particularly during the wet season.

In Nembe, the wet season is warm and cloudy, the dry season is hot and mostly cloudy, almost round the year. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from about 72°F to 86°F and is rarely below 65°F or above 89°F. The chance of wet days in Nembe varies very significantly throughout the year. The rainy season lasts 7.8 months, from March to November in the past, but presently, it lasts almost round the year.

The period, that was described as dry season in Nembe used to be from November to March but dry season can be said to be unpredictable as the rainy season.



**Climatic Conditions:** The following are some of the climatic conditions expressed by the people:

### **Flood and Erosion**

Most of the stakeholders expressed their concern over flood. According to them, Nembe does not experience flooding during the rainy season as other communities in Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa LGAs. However, in the recent past, communities in Nembe; Igbetaewoama, Agbakabiriyai and Etieama inclusive, have started experiencing flood.

**Erosion:** Another challenge raised by the people, according to them, heavy rainfall these days in addition to the flood, has eroded most part of the community and their farmlands. The buffers by the river are washed away and inflow of river water during flow tide has become a major threat to houses at the river bank. Some of which have been washed away. Community stakeholders described the issue of erosion and flooding as disasters that need the attention of the State Emergency Management Agency. (SEMA). According to them, if nothing is done, communities will be perpetually submerged in few years.



*Flood Ravaging Health Centre in Agbakabiriyai  
Nembe Kingdom*

**Rise in Sea Level:** The people also, expressed concern over the rise in sea level. It has affected their fishing pattern and caused many fisher folks to abandon the traditional fishing methods for unacceptable fishing practices such as the use of chemicals, dynamite and other dangerous substances to catch fish. This has resulted in conflict and violence between the perpetrators and community fisher folks who want to maintain acceptable standards of fishing. Many have stopped fishing as a livelihood for other livelihood opportunities. The fishing pattern of communities, according to them, is mostly dependent on the low tide, during which time, the mangrove forest will be dry and the fishes will move out to the river. Unfortunately, the sea level has increased, and in some areas, the level of water covers the mangrove forest, retaining available fish within the trees. In addition, the depth of creeks has become deeper, making it difficult for fishing

**Rainfall Pattern:** The farmers in particular complained about incessant rainfall patterns, with heavy storm that destroys farm lands, properties and so on. The understanding of rainfall patterns in the area varies. To some it has increased; to others, it has reduced, while the third set of persons are of the view that the level of rainfall is relatively the same but it falls all year round. However, all the groups agree that rainfall has become unpredictable.

**Heat:** The high level of temperature according to them is unbearable. The heat was said to have affected farmers more, as their seedlings wither as a result of intense temperature. Some of the educated local fisher folks are of the view that, the rise in temperature is contributory to the reduction of fishes in the creeks. According to them, the shallow creeks in the mangrove serve as breeding grounds for fishes but due to the

increase in temperature, fishes either migrate in search of comfortable places to breed or the fingerlings cannot survive the temperature of the water. A fundamental reason for the increase in temperature within the mangrove forest is the issue of mangrove forest deforestation, which was never experienced in the past but has become a major source of livelihood in the area.

## **Livelihood Systems and Analysis**

Livelihood system in Nembe can be categorized as agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods. Fishing and Farming are the major agricultural livelihoods in Nembe. However, there are other agricultural livelihood activities such as hunting, weaving, etc

**Fishing:** Fishing is the major occupation of the people. It is done both for subsistence and commercial purposes. Although men and women are involved in the activity, slight differences exist in the fishing methods adopted by both sexes. The Fishes caught include: Tilapia, Dolphin, Barracuda, Shiny nose, Red Snipers, Crab, Cat fish, Electric Fish, whale, Oysters, Periwinkle, Crayfish, Herring and Mullet are abundant on the creeks. Fishing in the river is done all through the year especially during the raining seasons. The team gathered that there exist 2 fishing periods in every month, when there is “good water” and “bad water”. The good water occurs twice a month during this period, fish is found in large quantities and the tide also favorable for fishing.

**Periwinkle:** The people of Nembe prohibits the selling of Periwinkles. According to the people, there has been several conflicts between Nembe and other communities over periwinkle harvesting and selling of perewinkles within Nembe territories. The Nembe people have a way of preserving natural resources from the environment for their survival, but, according to them, communities from far and near, who no longer have periwinkle in their mangrove, have moved to the Mangrove within Nembe territory in search of periwinkles, resulting to violent conflict. This according to the people is attributed to the impact of climate change, Environmental pollution from crude oil and cutting down of mangrove forest by both natives and nonnatives. Environmental pollution from crude destroys all living things within the area. The rise in temperature; large quantities of periwinkles are found in in very cool environment with thick mangrove forest, where the river water ebbs and exposes the periwinkles to some sun light. Unfortunately, the rise in sea level has increased, such that, ebb tide, does not expose the periwinkles to sun anymore, the cutting of mangrove, forest has allowed more direct sun light to the habitat of periwinkles and this has affected its reproduction and growth, resulting to the depletion of periwinkles in most areas. Thus, the search for periwinkle to Nembe territories and the violent conflicts.

According to them, though, The Police have been able to intervene to bring about peace, but recently, natives where molested in the mangrove by non-natives harvesting periwinkle and threatened them with a gun. It is likely that if this situation is not handles properly, it can degenerate into inter-communal crisis when people die as a result of violence over periwinkle harvesting. Though the population of periwinkle is fast reducing but due to the conservative policy, availability and quantity within the area is still high and the likelihood that people will be attracted to Nmebe mangrove for periwinkles is high.

**Farming:** Farming is on a lower scale in Nembe. Etieama, Agbakabriyai and Igbetaewoama communities are located on a fresh water and brackish water forest area and have the advantage of farming in addition to fishing. Most of the farmers are into fishing. The major crops farmed are Plantain, Banana, cocoyam, vegetables, etc. Farming is basically for subsistence. However, presently, most persons have abandoned their farming livelihood due to poor yield attributed to climate change impact.

**Hunting:** Hunting according to them used to be a livelihood considered as a game. Hunting Dogs are mostly used for hunting with few persons who have double and single barrel guns. Hunting livelihood has tremendously reduced. Most hunters have migrated to other areas due to poor catch and inability to meet their needs. Animals caught include, monkeys, chimpanzees, gorillas, Iguana, bush pigs, antelopes, glasscutters, monitor lizards etc.

**Forest Livelihood:** Most persons depend on forest resources for livelihood. There are those in thatch making, basket weaving, herbal plant harvesting and food making shrubs for local food preparation etc. The people expressed their challenge, that climate change has reduced the forest resources and some are either in extinction or going into extinction.

## **Non-Agricultural Livelihood System**

The Non-Agricultural livelihood activities in Nembe are similar to other communities. SPDC provides short term skilled and unskilled employment. Private individuals are also involved in livelihood activities such as electrical works, plumbing, pipe fitting, Boat drivers, mechanics, carpenters, welding, bricklaying, local contractors, trading, craft/artisans, tailors, etc. There are also instances where community youths are engaged by the oil companies and paid monthly (referred to as “stand by” - stay at home payment) for the period of a particular oil company construction work. Monthly amount agreed for the payment of a one person is further divided by the youth body to sometimes two or more persons. This according to them is considered a coping strategy to the unemployment challenge in the community.

## **Challenges of Livelihood Systems**

According to the people, Nembe was blessed with abundant natural resources. The brackish water forest and Fresh water forest, provides livelihood opportunities and the people depend almost entirely on the forest and sea resources in the area. However, the situation has changed presently. According to them, they are currently facing immense challenges due to the following:

- Flood of farm lands and community
- Rise in sea level
- Unpredictable and heavy rain falls, thunder and storms
- Increase in social vices and crimes: piracy, kidnapping, rape, stealing, internet fraud and other crimes
- Poor primary health care facilities
- High cost of food and materials, particularly for their livelihood
- Lack of government support programs in agriculture etc.

- Crude oil spill and the use of chemicals by suspected agencies of oil companies to dissolve spilled crude oil in the river
- Absence of good water for drinking.
- Drug Abuse, cultism and conflicts associated to oil company politics

### Climate Change, Vulnerability and Conflict Analysis

Climate Change Issue	Vulnerability	Associated Conflict	Adaptation
Flood of farm land and community	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
Rise in sea level	Loss of fishing ground	Conflict over fishing areas.	Use of longer and wider fishing nets. Change of fishing strategies and patterns which sometimes create further conflict due to the fishing technique. e.g. the drum fishing technique is disallowed in Igbetaewoama Nembe.
	Pollution of surface water sources for drinking eg 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.
Increase in Heat Wave	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

## Causes of Conflicts, Severity and Frequency hegemonic

S/ N	Causes of Conflicts	Severity of Conflict	Frequency of Conflict	Remark
1.	Leadership and power tussles	High	High	Resolved by community leadership and sometimes through the legal process of courts
2.	Intra community conflict over traditional leadership right between Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri- all Nembe communities	High	High	Community leadership resolves such disputes. Criminal cases are handed over to the police
3.	Conflict over oil company social responsibility governance issues	High	High	Oil companies use security agencies to suppress conflicts
4.	Youth restiveness leading to conflicts	High	High	Security committee set up to manage conflict issues generally
5.	Cult related conflicts	Low	High	Cultism has been prohibited and a security committee set up to manage monitor cult activities
6.	Boundary disputes	High	Low	Community leadership resolves such disputes. Criminal cases are handed over to the police

## General Observation and Lessons Learnt

### Observations

- Youth are not interested in agricultural livelihood due to the poor income earning opportunities in agriculture
- Oil company contracts and other jobs have become the main source of youth employment in Nembe
- Leadership tussle over chieftaincy position is high. This is said to be high due to entitlements from oil companies to community leadership particularly the traditional rulers
- Piracy is high within the waterways of Nembe. Soldiers were attacked and killed in their duty post at Nembe water front twice on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2015 and 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2016.
- Crude oil bunkering and artisanal refining is high within the Nembe waterways

- Dispute over ownership of land is high among the families in Etiema, while Agbakabiriyai and Igbetaewoama have boundary dispute

## Lessons Learnt

- Etiema, Agbakabiriyai and Igbetaewoama communities in Nembe expressed willingness to work together irrespective of the disputes over land in the area.
- Communities expressed happiness about the project. They contended that intervention projects are rarely implemented in their communities.

## 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 prospects of environmental conservation and management.
- Training of General 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.
- Training on conflict prevention, management and resolution
- Leadership training and community development
- 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

Agricultural economic potentials are enormous in Nembe. However, extractive industries governance is a major challenge that has to be managed effectively to enhance sustainability of agricultural potentials, while providing support for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

## Report Researched and Written by:



## Academic Associates PeaceWorks

B35, Trans Amadi Facilities Ltd.,  
129-132 Trans Amadi Industrial Layout,  
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Tel: +234 915 310 7741,

Email: [aapeaceworks@yahoo.com](mailto:aapeaceworks@yahoo.com); [www.aapw.org](http://www.aapw.org)