



Conflict Resolution

in Agwa Clan in Oguta Local Government Area (LGA)
of Imo State by a Network of Peace Actors –

A Case Study



Community acceptance and participation: members of Obudi and Ubah communities of Agwa Clan flanked with the peace intervention banner after the Peace Summit in November 2020

Abstract

Using the cumulative Agwa Clan conflicts and the resultant security crisis as an example, this case study examined how a network and grassroots approach to peacebuilding, social capital, and capacity building of volunteer peace actors under the Partner for Peace (P4P) Network in the Niger Delta region are utilized for conflict mitigation. Leveraging acquired capacity and their social capital as success factors, the peace actors carried out broad conflict stakeholder mapping, analysis, advocacy,

dialogue, and peace messaging as critical strategies for landmark conflict resolution. As a result, the intervention not only brought relative peace and reconciliation to the warring clans but also engendered the creation of helpful peacebuilding structures. This case study, as such, is built on testimonial stories (from purposively sampled respondents) of the conflicts and the P4P Network peacebuilding intervention collected through key informant interviews and field observations.

Acknowledgment

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About the Agwa Clan

Agwa is an agrarian clan of six autonomous communities (Mgbala, Mbano, Ubah, Obudi, Umuefeke, and Uworie-Umukpo) located in the riverine Oguta Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State in the South-East of Nigeria. The Agwa Clan is historically known as the ancient warriors' kingdom and is infamous for its modern-day conflicts. Naturally blessed with good soil for farming, oil, minerals, and human resources, the Agwa Clan plays host to oil companies. However, amidst these endowments and potential for progress and development, the people lacked one crucial thing: relative peace.

About Partners for Peace (P4P) Network

PIND founded the Partners for Peace (P4P) Network in 2013 as a network and grass-root approach to peacebuilding; to create a stable, enabling, and conducive environment for the Niger Delta region's economic growth and development. The P4P Network is a formidable network of peace actors of diverse backgrounds that work within their communities to prevent, mediate, and mitigate conflicts. Using conflict analysis and early warning and early response (EWER) as critical instruments, the P4P Network identifies and supports existing initiatives and creates new initiatives to address conflict risk factors further. Over the years, the strategic platform has progressively grown into a large membership organization of more than 10,000 members, with chapters in the nine states of Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers—including subchapters in 119 of the region's 185 LGAs (local government areas). With capacity building, funding, technical and other forms of support from PIND, and leveraging the social capital of their diverse membership, P4P Network peace actors have mitigated many emerging conflicts in communities across the region.

Background:

The Agwa Conflicts and Security Crisis

The conflicts and insecurity that periodically engulfed the Agwa Clan for over 30 years in its history began many decades ago, in the 1980s. The Agwa Clan was initially one homogenous community. In the year 2010, six autonomous communities were created. They include Mgbala, Mbano, Ubah, Obudi, Umuefeke and Uworie-Umukpo.

Evolving and cumulative, conflicts started in the Agwa Clan with land/boundary disputes in Ubah with neighboring Izombe and Uworia communities. When the Agwa Clan split into six autonomous communities, a deadly Ezeship (kingship) leadership struggle occurred among the new autonomous communities, particularly Uworia and Mbala, starting in 2005 and 2015, respectively. It became part of the conflict's mix and dynamics.

“ We have six autonomous communities in Agwa, which by the grace of God, at the time (in 2010), I was the President General of the Agwa Central Youths, a community governance structure that links the entire Agwa Clan. When the conflict started in 2018, we were trying to manage it. It started due to the Ezeship tussle; some were like boundary adjustment and town union problems. These problems started mainly with the traditional stool and the politicians. These people, when they could not fight themselves, they formed all these bad boys, giving them money, sponsoring them for arms which caused a lot of deaths, casualties, damaging of houses and properties in the Agwa Clan," said Mr. Ikechukwu Ezeocha, a renowned Agwa Clan community member.

An analysis of the conflict showed that:

- 01** The demand and control of royalties from the oil companies operating in the Agwa Clan was a significant driver for the leadership tussle, contributing to the conflict dynamics from a resource angle.
- 02** Youth unemployment and exclusion in decision-making in the oil-rich Agwa Clan was a fundamental cause and driver of the crisis. Most unemployed youths in the Agwa Clan were recruited as 'the conflict foot-soldiers.' These youths became members of violent cult groups by the power of the tussling political class. It tactically changed the last stage of the snowballing conflicts into widespread deadly cult wars.
- 03** The community lacked an effective, functional grievance mechanism. This would have fostered a process for systematically receiving, investigating, responding to, and closing out conflict issues or grievances from affected community members in a timely, fair, and consistent manner

“ The conflict we had in Agwa was related to cultism and the oil problem. They were dragging the oil; on the other hand, politicians were included. They were using the youths—the cult boys to fight each other,” said Blessing Alammezie, Obudu Agwa community woman.



On the right, Eze Dr. I. O. Asor at the Agwa Clan multi-stakeholders dispute resolution, conciliation and peacebuilding dialogue facilitated by P4P Network in November 2020

Impacting the Clan heavily, the accumulated conflicts and security crisis led to a massive loss of lives and properties, as many persons (mostly male youths) were killed and houses burnt.

“ Agwa was very bad security-wise. Then we did not sleep with our eyes closed,” said His Royal Majesty, Eze Dr. I. O. Asor, the traditional ruler of Obudi Agwa autonomous community.

“ The houses were many before, but now you cannot see any house in the entire Oworie. All the houses were razed down. You cannot see any person that had a vehicle that still owns the vehicle now in the entire Oworie. In Mbano, casualties were many, and more than 200 houses were razed down,” said Mr. Ikechukwu Ezeocha, a renowned Agwa Clan community member.

The conflict led to the displacement of many, with two internally displaced persons (IDP) camps springing up in communities within and outside the Agwa Clan. Furthermore, the conflicts severed interpersonal and community relations in the Agwa Clan, affected livelihoods as people within and outside the communities could not move freely, and facilitated reported incidents of rape, thereby introducing a gender dimension to the impact of the crisis on women and girls.

“ That time, women going to the market were taking risks. And people from outside could not bring their commodities to sell. When you came with your goods, if you are a woman, they could rape you; if you are a man, they could mess you up,” said Mr. Ikechukwu Ezeocha, a renowned Agwa Clan community member.

¹The casualties included police officers, as acknowledged by the Imo State Police Command Public Relations Officer during an advocacy visit by the P4P intervention team. The number of fatalities was reported in the **P4P intervention report**

²[Conflict Incident Monthly Tracker Imo State: May-June 2018](#)

³[Conflict Incident Monthly Tracker Imo State: March-April 2018](#)

“ If the violence continues, they will not have freedom of movement. They will lack jobs, money, and everything a human being will use to sustain themselves. It was very terrible, like rape. It caused a lot of damage in women's lives at that time—in their business, the market, and even going to church. There was no movement; they stayed indoors like people that were prisoners. So, it affected the women more, especially young ladies and girls,” said Amarachi Uzoma, an Uwuorie Agwa community woman.

Based on information gathered from the communities, the conflicts led to 60 deaths from 2015 to 2019. This occurrence and severity of violence in the area, as identified by Imo State P4P Network members, reported on the news, and analyzed on several PIND's conflict trackers, informed the peacebuilding interventions by the P4P Network.



Group photograph with delegates from Mgbala Autonomous Community after the Agwa Community Multi-stakeholders Dispute Resolution, Conciliation and peacebuilding Dialogue held on 4th November

The P4P Network Intervention: Conflict Resolution Strategies & Actions

01

Grassroots Peace Monitoring, Conflict, and Early Warning Reporting

As part of its functional design, P4P Network also has a strategic unit called Peace Monitors. Keeping their eyes and ears on the ground, the Peace Monitors in the P4P Network monitor and report conflicts in communities in the Niger Delta region. This team gathers information on emerging conflicts in communities and uploads conflict reports on PIND's Integrated Peace and Development Unit (IPDU) SMS-based platform [which serves as an early warning and early response (EWER) platform]]. From this, monthly Niger Delta conflict trackers are generated. The EWER platform recorded seven incidents of violence in Oguta LGA during that period.



The conflicts in Agwa were reported to us by community members who are also members of the P4P," said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

The incident monitoring and reporting of the cumulating Agwa conflicts informed the need for the P4P Network's intervention in the Agwa Clan. Accordingly, they activated the Prevent Team, another arm of the P4P Network that coordinates response activities.

02

Conflict Analysis, Stakeholder Mapping, and Advocacy

To understand and mediate the conflicts, the P4P Network conducted a comprehensive analysis of the conflicts and mapped the stakeholders.



After the conflict analysis, we did a stakeholder mapping. After the stakeholder mapping, we came back and made our proposal. When we got the support from PIND, we moved back to the community and held advocacy engagements, where we had to meet a lot of stakeholders to agree for their buy-in to mediate and to agree to participate in the mediation and conciliation processes," said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

With community acceptance gained, the peace actors proceeded to key informant interviews with some strategic stakeholders and key actors to understand the root causes of the conflict and what they thought could be lasting solutions. Also, they conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with a wide array of stakeholder groups - comprising traditional rulers and the members of their cabinet; the women's group and women leaders; the town union leadership; and the youths and the at-risk youth categories (these are the active members of the combatants and the cult groups). With these activities, the peace actors gained deeper community participation and actionable information on the conflicts' root causes, stakeholders, influencers, and foot-soldiers.



Group photograph of Agwa Clan delegates after the successful Agwa Peace Summit.

Based on the conflicts stakeholder mapping, analysis, and community participation, the peace actors organized a multi-stakeholder Peace Summit in 2020, which was the first such level of engagement and dialogue in the history of the conflicts in the Agwa Clan.

“ P4P facilitated the Agwa Peace Summit, with major key actors and stakeholders from the six autonomous communities in attendance. The Agwa Peace Summit was the first of its kind since the duration of violent conflict in Agwa. The Peace Summit brought together major key actors and players in the peace process in Agwa. The stakeholders, for once, after many years of violent conflicts, sat in a peace meeting with their opponents, discussing the terms and strategies for sustainable peace and development in Agwa. At the end of the Peace Summit, a 21-member Agwa Peace Monitors (APM) was constituted. The selection process was democratic, as each community freely nominated three representatives, out of which one must be a woman. Then P4P nominated three representatives too, out of which one was also a woman,” said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

Security agencies, including the Department of State Security Services (DSS), also participated in the Agwa Peace Summit.

04 Peace Messaging

The P4P Network, as part of the intervention, carried out intensive behavioral-change peace messaging, which contributed to the conflict resolution.

“ Alternative dispute resolution is what I see that they came to educate Agwa on. And they did that by lecturing our people in the town hall. They really improved the security situation in my community because orientation matters, and when they came here, they were able to educate us on our orientation. The orientation before then was so bad--people fought, abused, and did all sorts of bad things. But their intervention was an eye-opener; they opened the consciousness of our people regarding security and our conduct; the way we behave,” said His Royal Majesty, Eze Dr. I. O. Asor, the traditional ruler of Obudi Agwa autonomous community.

05 Resource Mobilisation and Leveraging Social Capital

Beyond mobilizing funds from PIND, the peace actors leveraged their social capital for the intervention. As a network approach in peacebuilding, the P4P peace actors come from all walks of life—including personnel of security agencies, who are associate members.

“ You need somebody to do documentation. You need somebody to do the talking. You also need somebody to do the observance and also do feedback reporting. So, [the] majority of the members with various forms of capacity were engaged in those areas. Some had to do the recording, which is administrative. They recorded participants in every advocacy visit or the focus group discussions. Some did the talking and the facilitation. Some did vigilance in the community to see if there were early warnings that people were no longer comfortable. Then, they give signs so that we can cut short the intervention and, maybe, leave the vicinity,” said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.



Chilos Godson presenting the P4P flyers to the Crown Prince and cross section of delegates during the Obudi Community Stakeholders Peace Dialogue, Focused Discussion and informant Interview on 20th October 2020

The P4P Network Intervention Results: "We Are Now Enjoying Our Community"

01

Peace and Security

As testified by community leaders and members of the Agwa Clan, after the P4P Network intervention in 2019–2020, the people of the Agwa Clan started to sleep with their eyes closed.

“As a matter of fact, before they arrived in Agwa, the community was very bad security-wise. Honestly speaking, then it was awful. There was killing, raping, and abduction. Whatever crime you can talk of was in Agwa. But now, I think the security agencies, with the intervention of this agency [P4P Network], things have improved, but not 100 percent. Then and now are different; there is a lot of difference. Now, we can sleep with one eye closed and one eye opened. Back then, we didn't sleep with our eyes closed. Now, I can say the security situation in Agwa has improved courtesy of them and the union they set up," said His Royal Majesty, Eze Dr. I. O. Asor.

“They came here when we were in serious crises, which took some people's lives. But, by the grace of God, their arrival here brought a solution to the crisis. They helped a lot because they interviewed so many people. They suggested how we were going to bring peace back to the community. And eventually, peace reigned. And we are now enjoying our community" said His Royal Highness, Eze Sir Blaize Ubah of Mbala autonomous community

02

Reconciliation

In the area of reconciliation, the peace actors also extinguished the hostility between the communities.

“For example, before, people could not walk together, greet each other, or move from one community to another. But now they are free to visit each other," said Amarachi Uzoma, a community woman.

“The difference is too big. Now you can move from your community to another community peacefully. You can eat in the bar now. Back then, nobody sells on the road. You cannot sell in your bar. People folded their businesses because of the security of their dear life. But now, you can go to Mbala. You can go to Umukpo. You can go freely without molestation," said Mr. Ikechukwu Ezeocha, a renowned Agwa Clan community member.

03 Youth Inclusion

The peace actors facilitated broader youth inclusion in the governance and resource scheme of things in the Agwa Clan.

“Community leaders agreed that they were ready for peace and what needed to be done was that the youths be integrated into the governance structure of the Agwa Clan. The youths said if they are also integrated, that means there has been a provision of a grievance mechanism because part of the problem was the lack of a grievance mechanism. 'Because I do not have anybody to complain to; all I need to do is to take my destiny into my own hands.' So, when the community leaders realized their shortfalls, they agreed to reintegrate most of the aggrieved segments of the Agwa Clan. So, in that respect, they agreed; the commitment was high,” said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

03 Conflict Behaviour Change and Mind-Shift

The peace messaging by the P4P Network peace actors--targeted to the Agwa youth (the conflict foot-soldiers and most at-risk population)--created behavioral change among them.

“We have left all those violent things. Before, we do not cooperate with or see each other. But now, we are cooperating because they told us that killing each other is not good. The people that did not want to cooperate still ran away from the villages. Before the intervention, you would not have been able to stay here, but we are calm now. We are also hopeful that programs that will empower us economically will be introduced as we do not go to those politicians again. When they call us about how they will do the next election, we tell them that we need social amenities and economic empowerment; we do not have roads, water, and light. So, they should come and do something for us and stop calling us,” said Sunday Everest, an at-risk Agwa community youth.

“The difference now is the cultists do not go fighting and beating people. Now, everyone is concerned [for peace to reign], and there is calm,” said Chikwado Anozie, an Agwa community youth.

P4P Network Intervention Success Factors



Capacity: the capacity of the peace actors played a significant role in the success of the Agwa Clan intervention.



Experience and competence are key to why P4P succeeded in resolving the age-long Agwa conflict," said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

Over the years of evolution of the P4P Network, PIND has continued to build the capacity of the peace actors and expose them to the technicalities of peacebuilding/conflict resolution. Focal persons of the P4P Network chapters also pass down the training received from PIND. The successful implementation of the highlighted intervention strategies by the peace actors and the results are evidence of the capacity built.



Capacity: the capacity of the peace actors played a significant role in the success of the Agwa Clan intervention.



Social Capital: As a network approach to peacebuilding, the peace actors leveraged relationships and linkages the Network members had in the Agwa Clan.



There had to be a relationship between the lead facilitator and some community members. So, we also leveraged the existing relationship of some of the members to make them agree. So, those were some of the success factors," said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.



Peace Messaging: The peace messaging by the peace actors helped to catalyze stability in the Clan. The peace messaging was made throughout the peacebuilding process, such as during the capacity-building exercises and advocacy engagements.



They consult the people and the youths; and in the meeting, they give them a kind of teaching (peace messages) that enlightened their minds and made them understand that what they were doing was not good," said Blessing Alammezie, an Obudi Agwa community woman.

P4P Network Intervention Challenges, Solutions, and Recommendations



Fund Release: The timing of fund release by PIND did not suit the urgency of the conflict response required.



The mode of funding was too bureaucratic. And, again, the mode of releasing the fund was in bits. And most of the time, it did not really work well where you were [assigned funds] activity-by-activity. And these things sometimes had to run concurrently. We ran into a problem when the first fund was released, and we needed to do focus group discussions (FGDs), advocacy, and others concurrently. If you would tamper with time, there was a tendency for a relapse to conflict," said Comrade Chilos Godson, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

The peace actors addressed this challenge by making payment promises to their vendors based on goodwill. However, there is a need for more effective operationalization of the conflict early response mechanism by PIND and other stakeholders working towards improving the peace in the Agwa Clan. This implies that necessary funds for mitigating conflicts should be availed in time to have their maximum effect. In addition, emergency funds could also be set aside for prompt response to unanticipated conflicts.

The expectation of the Youths: To instill the peace messages and participate in the conflict resolution processes, the Agwa Clan youths expected to be empowered with vocational skills, employment, and other forms of trade. As a way of managing this expectation, the peace actors made them understand that giving peace a chance would engender a stable, enabling environment for such empowerment and overall development of the Agwa Clan.

With the youths of the Agwa Clan still expecting economic empowerment, the risk of not maintaining the post-conflict positive behavior is high. Therefore, there is a need for relevant government and non-governmental organizations to prioritize livelihood improvements in the communities. This will forestall a re-emergence of conflicts that are triggered by economic needs.

In conclusion, there is a need for continuous strengthening of the Agwa Clan P4P Network subchapter. The growth of the subchapter--in terms of membership and its activities--will further contribute to countering violent behavior, particularly among the members of the different cult groups. The growth would also help to maintain the level of conflict behavior change the intervention created in the Agwa Clan. Furthermore, the post-conflict peacebuilding efforts also need to integrate economic elements (self-employment skills and other forms of economic empowerment for the youths). This will further reduce conflict foot-soldier tendency among the youths of the Agwa Clan.

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