



Reduction of Militancy and Cultism with Alternative Livelihood

In Ilaje Local Government Area
of Ondo State



Morning drill with the ex-militants/cultists for mindset and re-orientation training session in Igbokoda, Ilaje Local Government Area (LGA), 2021.

Abstract

Taking a critical look at the resultant effects of militancy and cultism on the political, economic, and social situations of the Ilaje Local Government Area (LGA) of Ondo State, this case study portrays how the Partners for Peace (P4P) Network utilizes collective action, volunteerism, and team spirit for effective militancy/cultism prevention and mitigation. Using the P4P as a central focus, the case study builds around the testimonials garnered through literature reviews and key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with selected project beneficiaries, including ex-militant generals; the Amotekun Corps; the Head of Market Women; the Oba of Igbokoda

Kingdom; the Christian Association Chairman; the Chief Imam; ex-cultists; the National Union of Road Transport Workers; the Divisional Police Officer; the Marine Police; the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Commission; and a Peace Club member.

Through their stories, the case study identifies the broader impact of the Network's interventions: personal, household, organizational, and community levels. It showcases the situation, the activities that occurred, the outcome of the intervention, the current situation, how it has changed, and who and what catalyzed the change.

Acknowledgment

This case study report was made possible by the support and cooperation of the Ilaje local government (LGA) community stakeholders, who willingly told their stories of the conflict and peacebuilding processes. PIND appreciates the respondents and stakeholders who availed their time and thoughts to shed light on the existing problems, the peacebuilding processes, and the outcomes in their domains. Special acknowledgment goes to ex-militant General Obodo; the Amotekun Corps; the Head of Market Women; the Oba of Igbokoda Kingdom; Mrs. Edema Waire; the Christian Association Chairman; the Chief Imam; ex-militant General Akinjirin; and Chief Boyi, a leader at Owoye. Finally, we are indebted to the actions of the P4P Network in fostering peace and development in Ilaje LGA of Ondo State – their actions are what gave root to this case study.



Background: Militancy and Cultism in Ilaje

Ilaje LGA is located in the coastal areas of Ondo State, bordering the Atlantic ocean. According to the 2006 census data, Ilaje has a population of 209,615, mostly fishermen, farmers, traders, and artisans. Ilaje is very rich in crude oil and is a host to oil exploration corporations. The coastal nature of the area and the oil attracted diverse people to the area for jobs, fishing, or trading. The high presence of oil/exploration resulted in varying interests in the distribution of economic resources. Thus, groups arose in the year 2000, agitating for resource control and extending the agitation to other demands--such as job opportunities and the development of the oil-producing areas. The agitation was later hijacked by splinter militant groups, most of which belonged to different cult groups. The first group that began the agitation was the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

“ There were about eleven militant groups, but despite the Amnesty of 2017 when our arms were collected, nothing was given to us. So, the struggle continues. There were five strong cult groups - Aiye a.k.a. Black Axe, Eiye a.k.a supreme, Vikings, Islands, and Buccaneers - in Ilaje," said ex-militant General Obodo.

Militants operate on the sea and creeks, carrying highly sophisticated guns while the cultists are the groups with a common interest, fraternity, and brotherhood—but mostly violent in the operations," said the Amotekun Corps Officer, when asked the difference between the militants and the cultists.

Mrs. Stella Nathaniel, the Secretary of the P4P Ondo State Chapter, identified the problems at the LGA as militancy and cultism. A root cause analysis by the Network showed the following factors: lack of job/employment opportunities, marginalization, and environmental degradation, all of which resulted in a myriad of problems in the communities such as killings, robbery, pipeline vandalism, electoral violence, piracy, kidnapping, hijacking of ships, and arms proliferation.

“ Shops close between 5-6 p.m for fear of robbery, rape, molestation, or killing. About three months ago, you could not travel on the water to buy fish or go to Onitsha for goods for fear of pirates, robbers, or kidnapers," said Iyaloga General, the Head of Market Women.

PIND's Integrated Peace and Development Unit's (IPDU) conflict trackers reported this rising trend, with its weekly conflict update published in December 2020 spotlighting violent criminality in Ondo State that had led to over 140 incidents of conflict fatalities between January 2018 and September 2020. The violence in the area was reported in the news media as well. For example, the Sahara Reporters of June 17, 2021, reported that "cult members were apprehended after killing a member of a rival cult group who belonged to the "Aiye Confraternity" around the Zion area of Igbokoda town." Also, according to the Daily Post (Metro), published December 24, 2021, no fewer than five persons had been killed in a clash between rival cult groups in Igbokoda headquarters of Ilaje LGA in Ondo State over land disputes. Likewise, in the Hope Newspaper of May 8, 2022, the Ondo State Governor, Arakunrin Oluwarotimi Akereolu, condemned the upsurge in cult activities and other social vices in Ilaje LGA.

[¹Spotlighting Violent Criminality in Ondo State](#)

About the Partners for Peace (P4P) Network

PIND founded the Partners for Peace (P4P) Network in 2013 to, through a network and grass-root approach to peacebuilding, 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 key 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 by leveraging the social capital of their diverse membership, P4P Network peace actors have mitigated many emerging conflicts in communities across the region.



Reducing Militancy and Cultism in Ilaje LGA: The P4P Intervention Strategies

Utilizing the conflict trackers, media reports, and information from the communities of the LGA, the P4P Network project team, led by Mrs. Odedele Yinka, carried out peacebuilding interventions between the years 2019 to 2021.

“ The P4P mobilized human, material, and other resources for advocacy, training, and entrepreneurship to reduce militancy and cultism with support from PIND. The militants and cultists were re-oriented and linked to alternative livelihoods through the support of philanthropists in the LGA and other influential persons. The collaboration with the traditional leaders and security agents contributed to the successes of the interventions," said Mrs. Odedele Yinka, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

Advocacy Engagements for the Reduction of Militancy/Cultism: The advocacy team included the Ilaje P4P subchapter members to instill ownership of the process. The Ilaje LGA Chairman was visited in October 2021.

“ I will ensure that a budget line for peacebuilding is created because I cannot govern the LGA without peace and that no meaningful/sustainable development can thrive without peace," said the Ilaje LGA Chairman.

The Ondo State Commissioner of Police (CP) sent a signal in January 2022 to the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Ilaje LGA to support the project team and as a backup where needed and not to arrest the militants/cultists at the P4P Network training/meetings.

“ Your training will advance our knowledge for intelligence gathering," said the Amotekum Corps Officer who attended the advocacy.

A vital advocacy visit was also paid to the Ondo State Oil Producing Development Commission (OSOPADEC) in October 2021.

Mrs. Odedele Yinka, the intervention team leader, confirmed that the Director of Community Development and Youth Affairs, who represented the Chairman, gave the P4P Network Ondo State Chapter a task.

“ Submit a proposal for skill training/empowerment to rehabilitate and engage the trained militants/cultists," said the Director of Community Development and Youth Affairs.

At the Stakeholders' Dialogue Meetings: One ex-militant, who preferred to be anonymous and was awarded a pipelines surveillance contract, assured the team.

“I will employ ten trained ex-militants/cultists into the pipeline of work for monthly salaries. It will reduce the number of youths without jobs [especially during the election year (2022-2023)] so that the trained militants/cultists will not backslide and be used to foment trouble or for election violence” said an ex-militant.

At the dialogue meeting, the DPO, NSCDC, Marine Police, and the Amotekun Corps gave out their hotlines as the control room for incident reports and response.

“I promise to convene a town hall meeting to organize a security structure for the LGA,” said the Oba of Igbokoda.

The Training of Militants/Cultists for Alternative Livelihood: About 140 ex-militants/cultists were trained in peacebuilding/conflict management and entrepreneurs between 2019-2022.

“There were nine women in training,” said Mrs. Odedele Yinka, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

They were all trained in conflict management and constructive engagement rather than violence/fighting.

“The outcome of the training in January 2022 was a joint resolution never to backslide,” said the P4P Network Ondo State Chapter Secretary.

The participants were inaugurated as positive peace agitators and integrated into the Ilaje P4P subchapter for grooming and behavior maintenance.

“There were media phone-in programs for a wider coverage for peacebuilding messages, while the sustainability structures put in place, especially to catch them [potential militants/cultists] with peacebuilding messages, was the establishment of peace clubs at Igbokoda and Ilaje High Schools,” said the P4P Network Ondo State Chapter Secretary.



Ex-militants/ ex-cultists at training, Igbokoda



Radio-phone program on militancy /cultism re-orientation, Breeze 91.9 FM

We Can Now Move and Trade Freely in Ilaje communities: Intervention Results and Evidence

Security and Peace: Generally, peace has improved in the area since interventions in 2021.

- “ Shops closed between 5 p.m.-6 p.m last year (2021), but now the market hours extend to 11 p.m.-- without fear of robbery, rape, molestation, or killing. You can now travel on the water to buy fish or to Onitsha to buy goods [with] no fear of pirates, robbers, or kidnappers. Again, there are evening markets at different locations to sell fish from the ocean in the evenings," said Iyaloga General, the Head of Market Women.
- “ After the stakeholders' dialogue meeting of January 2022 organized by the P4P, the Ilaje people called for a town hall meeting and resolved to levy, fund, and sustain a constituted vigilante group to curb crime, report, and supervise the town at both the day and night," said Oba of Igbokoda.
- “ We now preach at Mosques against violence to sustain the peace we now enjoy," said the Chief Imam, which the Christian Association Chairman corroborated.
- “ We cannot see most of the militants and cultists again--maybe they have repented, relocated, or run away because their numbers have now reduced in the town. We hold smooth political meetings with no disruption, ongoing voter registration, and there is no disturbance; even ceremonies/events are hitch-free. We even socialize till late at night, despite no electricity but solar," said Mrs. Edema Waire, a community member.

Sustainability of Peace and Security in Ilaje Communities: Based on the interventions done and the structure put in place, the relative peace in the area is expected to be sustained.

- “ The trainings/dialogue meetings from the P4P Ondo State gave us knowledge, information, and effective collaboration to work with and boost our operations," said the representative from the Amotekun Corps.
- “ It was when we planned to hijack the African tanker ship (the largest ship) that the Federal Government organized amnesty. By then, I used to smoke at least 20 wraps of marijuana a day, I loved to consume the local gin soaked with marijuana. I stopped smoking two years ago and stopped consuming local drinks. I recently attended the school of Theology (Word of Faith Bible Institute) with a National Diploma in Pastoral work. I am now a model and example for others to emulate. I organized the World Peace Day in September 2021 at Igbokoda, I created two peace clubs, and engaged in mediation between conflict groups," said ex-militant General Akinjirin.
- “ The Peace Club structures were established to catch them young before being influenced to imbibe any negative vices," said Mrs. Odedele Yinka, the P4P Network intervention team lead.
- “ I am a member of the Peace Club, and our slogan is 'If you see something, say something, and do something,'" said Miss Ebum Jumoke, a senior secondary school II student of Igbokoda Grammar school.

“ We have hotlines to the police, NSCDC, Amotekun, and even the PIND SMS platform, to report incidents, so we can now sleep and close the two eyes," said the Ilaje P4P Subchapter Chairman.

Youth Engagement: A leader at Owoye (a border town between Ondo and Delta), Chief Boyi bought 200 pieces of Yamaha 40 horsepower engines for 200 youths (marine transportation) in 2021 to be gainfully engaged, just after one of the P4P network Interventions (a community dialogue meeting of October 2021).

“ Ten ex-cultists were employed for pipeline surveillance and placed on monthly salaries," said ex-militant General Obodo, who confirmed Chief Boyi's purchase.

“ I was reformed with trainings and peace messages. I am now a Peace Advocate to the people for a change of life. I believed formally in the slogan that--you can take the arms, but the struggle continues. The struggle that continues now is peacebuilding activities. I was a real militant general whom people [were] scared of, including my family members. I belonged to the Black Bush camp of militants that visited different camps to enroll/enlist more militants for the struggle. We hijacked ships, we kidnapped, we robbed (these were called the struggle)," said ex-militant General Akinjirin.

P4P Network Intervention: Challenges, Solutions & Recommendations

Monetary Expectations by the People: Engagement or participation in peacebuilding activities sometimes are done with expectation of monetary rewards based on precedent set by other organizations and researchers before the emergence of the P4P volunteerism approach.

“ Many partners come to this area for studies and pay them for their time and for any service, so they expect the same thing from P4P," "They will tell you that we left the market, shop, or office" said Mrs. Odedele Yinka, the P4P Network intervention team lead.

The P4P network addressed this challenge by continually enhancing participants' knowledge on the three key tenets of volunteerism- free-will, non-pecuniary motive, and overall benefit of the common good. They are also introduced to the PIND's Economic Development Program opportunities in aquaculture, cocoa, cassava, oil palm, poultry, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), and renewable energy to improve their economic livelihood. Furthermore, their skills are broadened in various facets of peacebuilding and conflict managements where some have adopted as a career part. However, there is a need for relevant government and non-governmental organizations to prioritize livelihood improvements in the communities to reduce level of dependence on handout by community inhabitants.

Irregularity in Funding and Release: The P4P Network noted that they get funding from PIND very late and that this affects the timeliness of their interventions. PIND and other stakeholders working towards improving peace in the communities need more effective operationalization of the conflict early response mechanism. This implies that necessary funds for mitigating conflicts should be availed in a timelier fashion. Emergency funds could also be set aside for prompt response to conflicts, especially when unanticipated. The P4P Network should endeavor to mobilize resources independently for interventions as a sustainability strategy with less dependence on PIND.

Difficult Terrain in Bringing the Peace Actors Together: Because of the geographical peculiarities of Ondo State, about three-quarters of the communities of the LGA are on the water.

“ We spend like NGN 30,000 to hire a boat per day. We have difficulty bringing our people together for meetings or for any P4P activities. Thus, we have to meet our members at different locations and at different times, which is costly,” said Mr. Timilehin, the P4P Network Subchapter Chairman

P4P Network subchapters can be further set up to manage this difficulty in the riverine communities. This will expand the grassroots structure by creating local networks that can manage conflicts on their own before it escalates to violence. Furthermore, capacity strengthening activities should be organized for members of the new chapters to ensure they can nip conflict issues in the bud. At the same time, they get moral and financial support from the Ondo State Chapter when necessary. In addition, key community stakeholders--such as the traditional rural, religious leaders, youth, and women--should contribute resources to sustain the P4P Network subchapters since they are the first-level beneficiaries of P4P Network interventions in the forms of peace and security in their localities.

In summary, there is a need for continuous strengthening of conflict management and peacebuilding programs in Ilaje communities to prevent re-emergence of militancy and related criminalities. There should be growth of the P4P subchapter with its activities in the communities to further contribute to countering violent behavior, especially among the members of the different youth and cult groups. Furthermore, intentional integration of economic development programs (self-employment skills and other forms of economic empowerment for the youths) will further reduce grievances, cultism and militancy tendency among the youths of Ilaje Local government Area and beyond.



LEARN MORE

Website: PINDfoundation.org

CONNECT

Phone: +2348172064624 or +2349087568780

Email: info@PINDfoundation.org

ENGAGE

 **Facebook:** [Facebook.com/PINDfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/PINDfoundation)

 **Instagram:** [@PINDfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/PINDfoundation)

 **LinkedIn:** "Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)"

 **Twitter:** [@PINDfoundation](https://twitter.com/PINDfoundation)

VISIT US

Abuja: 25 Jimmy Carter Street, Asokoro, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Port Harcourt: 50 B/C, Omerelu Street, GRA Phase 1, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Warri: 1 PIND-EDC Drive, Egbokodo-Itsekiri, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria

