

# POLICY BRIEFING NOTE

## INSECURITY IN AKWA IBOM STATE: ISSUES, ACTORS AND SOLUTIONS

### Executive Summary

*Insecurity is a major problem across Nigeria’s South-South region. This policy brief focuses on the different dimensions of conflict and insecurity, causes and actors in Akwa Ibom State, It also provides recommendations on how to address the root causes of insecurity in the state.*

### Issues and dynamics of conflicts and insecurity in Akwa Ibom State

In Akwa Ibom State, the major issues that drive insecurity are sea piracy, cultism, communal disputes, land disputes, youth restiveness, kidnapping, destitute street children, child trafficking and drug abuse. These issues often lead to violence, such as an increase in sea piracy, perpetrated on fishing folks and traders travelling by boats to purchase goods.

However, the overarching driver of insecurity in Akwa Ibom State is poor governance capacity, which is seen in the context of the inability of those in authority to address factors that drive insecurity. Some of the underlying factors include unemployment, lack of development and basic amenities, political disruptions with huge social consequences and unbridled corruption.

Acts of violence and conflicts that shape insecurity in Akwa Ibom State are mainly carried out by poorly employed youth. These youths ages between 10-40 are often linked to politicians at the state level and do their bidding.

Hence, while these youth groups/gangs routinely perpetuate acts of violence on the streets of major towns and cities in Akwa Ibom, they are specially mobilized by politicians during the election period to carry out election related violence.

The spillover of this weakness by state organs is that even young women have taken to child trafficking and drug abuse, thereby complicating the state of insecurity. Recent response by the state government resulted in the implementation of some Amnesty Programme where armed gangs and cult groups in the state were the target. However, the implementation of the Amnesty Programme and proscription of cult groups are yet to yield positive results. This shows the need for the State Government to develop sophisticated approaches to conflict resolution and insecurity, and address the root causes of failure which emanate from poor governance capabilities in the State.

At the levels of community there is a serious vacuum in the aspect of community enabled security system response and stakeholders’ dialogue on the issue of insecurity in the state especially between the government, security agencies and the traditional leaders. The research has shown that most communities are unable to manage the security challenges they face by themselves. This is made worse by limited channels for dialogue between state security agencies such as the Police and Department of State Security (DSS) and communities.

### EMERGING TRENDS

The widespread growth and emerging trend in cultism and drug abuse starting from secondary schools must be addressed to avoid the transformation of the state into a hub for cultism and crime.

Piracy and water related crimes are emerging because of inadequate maritime security within the waterways of the state. This has opened the economy of the state to dangerous gangs, with some coming from neighboring states. Free movement of militants and violent groups is a source of concern as they operate at will.

State’s culture of children living within the extended family system is being exploited by organized groups involved in child trafficking and child labour. This needs urgent and increased surveillance by NAPTIP.



Akwa Ibom State is also characterized by high unemployment, especially among youth. This is an important challenge that needs to be addressed as part of efforts to address insecurity in Akwa Ibom State. As the figure below shows, there has been a growing trend of unemployment in the State. With the exception of 2009 and 2010, the current unemployment rate in Akwa Ibom is the highest since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999.

**Trend of Unemployment in Akwa Ibom State**



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The interconnected nature of the Niger Delta Region by water must remain a source of attention for the Federal Government.
- To ensure better attention to the role of the state, action should be taken to set up a Committee to look into the demands of the Region under the 16-Point Agenda of PANDEF (2016).
- Akwa Ibom rests on an ethnic tripod and there are growing strains on the peace and harmony of the state as the third arm, the Oro people, feel aggrieved and marginalized. The State government should set up a panel of inquiry to look into the grievances of the Oron people, which include political and infrastructural marginalization.
- There is a need for increased dialogue between the State Government, Security Agencies and Traditional Rulers on issues of insecurity in the State.
- It is recommended that the State Government should establish a platform for community security relations that will involve both state and non-state actors in the promotion of security in the state.
- While the state amnesty programme of October 2018 represents a major point of departure, an expert group needs to be empaneled to revisit its structure, strategy and mandate. A proper program of disarmament and deradicalization should be implemented for the repentant militants, with efforts to stem further proliferation of militants and cults.
- Women are significantly affected by violence and insecurity in Akwa Ibom State. Cult groups and criminal gangs perpetuate rape, sexual exploitation and forced prostitution against women in Akwa Ibom State. There is an urgent need for the Akwa Ibom State government to ensure the implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) 2015.

### Further Reading

Oyosoro Felix Idongesit and Nelson Okene (2020) *Insecurity in Akwa Ibom State: Issues, Actors and Solutions*. Research Report for Niger Delta Dialogue, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria.

### Credits

This policy brief was written by Oyosoro Felix Idongesit and Nelson Okene. The research was supported by the Niger Delta Dialogue through funding from the European Union. However, the opinions expressed does not necessarily reflect the views of the Niger Delta Dialogue or the European Union. This policy material can be reproduced without permission from the authors on the condition that the Niger Delta Dialogue is acknowledged in the reproduced material.



**Publication of  
Niger Delta Dialogue  
Secretariat**

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