

Conflict Briefing:

Rise in Communal Conflict and Gang Violence in Cross River State

August 2017



and street children. The involvement of street children in criminality may also be related to internal displacement and forced migration resulting from extended communal conflicts. In Cross River, communal conflict and gang violence tends to be quite lethal and growing more so in recent times. Since 2009, over 200 reported violent incidents caused an estimated 752 fatalities, the majority of which were caused by communal violence and criminality and cultism.. Figure 1 below shows that fatalities due to communal violence spiked rose over the last year and spiked sharply in July of 2017. Figure 2 on the next page shows that communal violence has been concentrated at the borders of Benue and Akwa Ibom, while criminality and cultism has been concentrated around the city of Calabar.

This conflict briefing provides a snapshot of the trends and patterns in conflict risk factors at the state and LGA levels, drawing on data available on the P4P Peace Map (<http://www.p4p-nigerdelta.org/>).

It identifies key interrelated drivers and traces the link between communal conflicts and rise in gang violence and criminality, summarizes the emerging security and economic implications, and provides recommendations for promoting peace and stability in the state.

Gang violence, and communal conflicts over land and boundary disputes have become prevalent in Cross River state. Farmland is a key resource that communities depend upon for subsistence and livelihoods. This has resulted in recurrent tribal and communal conflicts over land rights and access. In the last two decades, the state has been the site of several violent conflicts involving communities within the state, and others from neighbouring Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi and Benue states.

Additionally, for many years, Cross River was part of an extended territorial dispute between Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon over the Bakassi peninsula. Following a decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2002, full sovereignty over the peninsula was transferred to Cameroon in August 2008. The transfer of power to Cameroon resulted in the internal displacement of the Nigerian population of Bakassi, who were subsequently resettled in communities in Cross River. The resettlement has led to ongoing conflict between the relocated populations and their host communities over social-economic issues.

The dynamic nature of communal conflict has further reinforced gang violence and criminality in the state. In recent times, there has been a rise in incidents of gang violence and criminality, which could be attributed to the growth of cult groups

Figure 1: Trends in Conflict Incidents and Fatalities in Cross River (Q1 2009-Q3 2017)

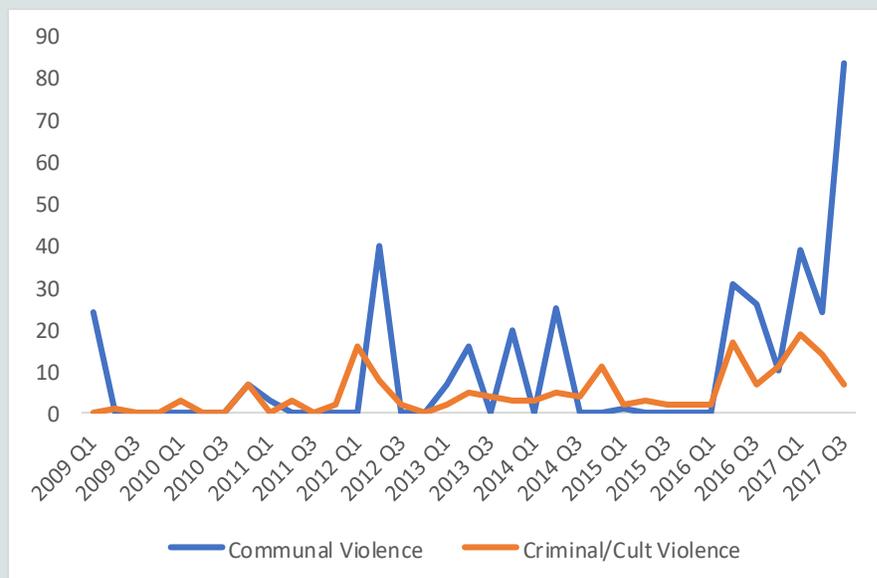
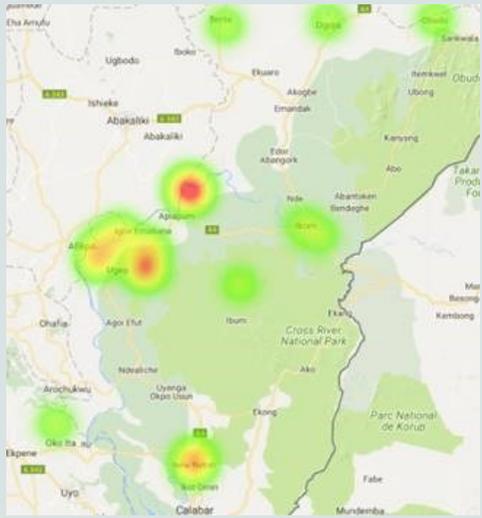
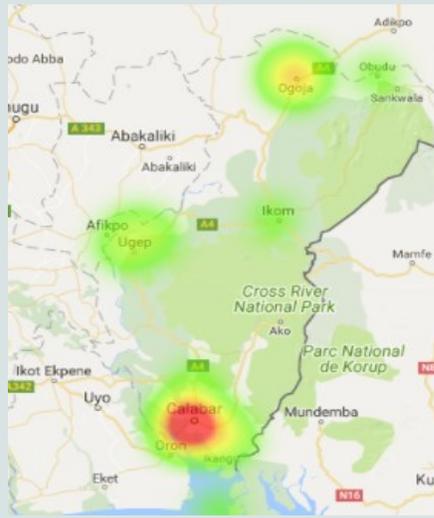


Figure 1: Reported fatalities in Cross River State. Sources: All Peace Map sources triangulated. Data shows that criminal and cult violence increased in 2016 while communal violence spiked sharply in 2017.

Figure 2: Concentration of Communal Conflict (2009-2017)



Concentration of Crime/Cult Violence (2009-2017)



From January 2009-2017: Data shows that despite some overlap, communal violence is mainly at the borders of Benue and Akwa Ibom States, while crime is concentrated around Calabar. Data Source: Nigeria Watch (www.nigeriawatch.org).

The border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon deeply impacted the conflict dynamics in the state. As noted, the transfer of authority over the Bakassi resulted in the displacement of Nigerians from the area, who were subsequently resettled in designated LGAs in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. In addition, the transfer of the oil-rich peninsula to Cameroon resulted in the declassification of Cross River as a littoral state in Nigeria, and resulted in the state surrendering seventy six offshore oil wells to Akwa Ibom state. This development created distrust between the two states and seemingly contributed to renewed communal conflicts along the border between them.

The prevalence of longstanding communal conflicts have resulted in the displacement of people, the dislocation of communities, and forced migration within the state. This impacts the conflict landscape in the state to varying degrees. Currently, the state is faced with rising incidents of gang violence and criminality attributed mainly to cult groups and street gangs, particularly in the south, in the vicinity of Calabar. The parallel rise in communal conflict and gang violence (see Figure 1), could be an indication that they are both driven by related factors. For instance, the involvement of street children in criminality has been linked to internal displacement resulting from extended communal conflicts in the state. As outlined in a February 2017 PIND brief (<http://pindfoundation.org/tag/the-street-kids-of-calabar/>), cult gangs are increasingly enlisting street children as foot soldiers in their supremacy battles for territorial expansion and relevance.

Interrelated Drivers and Conflict Dynamics

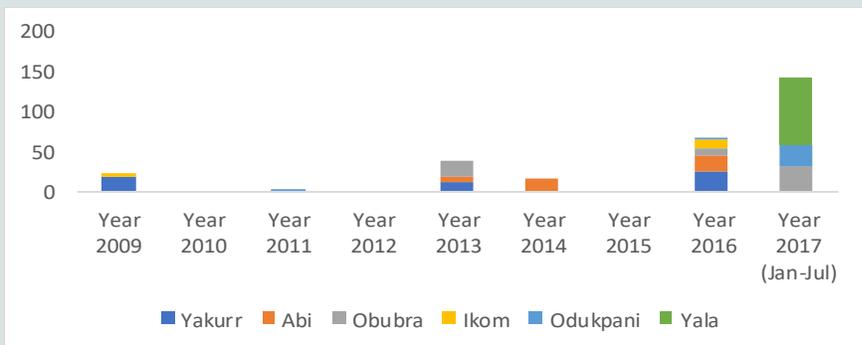
The recurrence of communal conflict and the growing threat of gang violence in Cross River can be understood within the context of diverse interrelated and often overlapping conflict risk factors. Specifically, these risk factors take the form of disputes over land ownership and access, inter-state boundary/territorial disputes, long-standing communal enmity, cultural attachment to land, forced migration, dependence on land for subsistence/livelihood, urbanization, poverty/unemployment, arms proliferation, youth gangs and cultism. These factors are mutually reinforcing and have varying degrees of impact on communal conflict and gang violence in the state.

Land disputes are a major driver of communal conflict in the state. Most communities depend on their farmlands for subsistence, and they are culturally attached to land considered inheritance from their ancestors. As a result, people feel compelled to resist any attempt to share or sell land, resulting in frequent communal conflicts over land ownership and access, whether the land is currently being cultivated or not. For instance, disputes over ownership of farmland has been the cause of a longstanding conflict between the Nko and Oyadama communities in Yakurr and Obubra LGAs, respectively. Conflict over land tends to be

periodic, with intermittent lethal spikes, killing dozens. Figure 3 below shows that Yakurr and Obubra have a history of violence going back to 2009, while this year violence in Yala LGA spiked suddenly.

The location of the state also makes it susceptible to boundary disputes. It shares boundaries with Akwa Ibom, Benue and Ebonyi state, as well as with the Republic of Cameroon. In the last two decades, there have been recurrent boundary disputes between communities in Cross River and others from neighboring states. Generally, these conflicts are driven by competing claims to land by border communities.

Figure 3: Annual Communal Violence Fatalities by LGA in Cross River State



Data shows that some LGAs have a long history of communal violence (eg. Obubra and Yakurr) while violence escalated suddenly in others (Yala). Data Sources (all sources triangulated on Peace Map).

The graphic above is a Heat Map (screenshot) of the Geographical Spread of Communal Conflict and Gang Violence in Cross River — www.p4p-nigerdelta.org.

Figure 4: Conflict Risk Factors in Cross River by LGA (2016 - 2017)

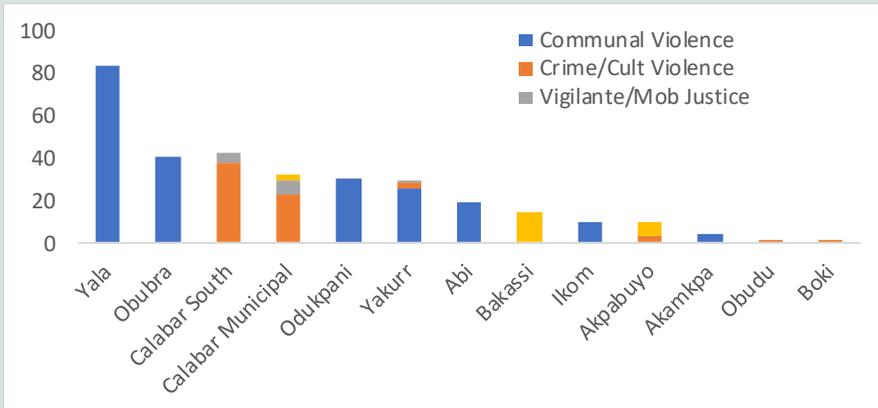


Figure 2: Reported conflict risk factors in Cross River by LGAs, January 2016-June 2017. Graph shows communal conflict, gang violence and criminality as key drivers of insecurity, particularly around the city of Calabar, Odukpani and

LGA Level Summary

January 2016 - June 2017

Calabar Municipal/South

Calabar, the capital city of Cross River state, experienced several incidents of lethal violence between January 2016 and June 2017. In 2016, incidents were mainly related to criminality and gang violence. In June, a police sergeant was killed during a shootout between policemen and a gang of robbers. In August, gunmen attacked the staff quarters of the University of Calabar, kidnapped a student and manhandled a lecturer and his wife. In October, seven militants and pirates were killed by soldiers under the military task force, 'Operation Delta Safe'. In separate incidents, the Director of the State Ministry of Health and a soldier under the military task force were abducted. Also in October, seven including a police inspector and a corporal were killed during a shootout between the police and cultists.

During the first half of 2017, several incidents of criminality and gang violence were reported. In February, a vice principal was killed in his house by masked men, and a man was stabbed to death by unknown assailants. In March, eight were killed in series of clashes between rival cult groups. The gang war was allegedly triggered by the killing of a lecturer who is a key member of one of the cult groups. Separately, in March, organized labor

protested over the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report for the construction of a highway in the state. In May, a clash between some personnel of the Nigerian Navy and the Police reportedly caused the death of over ten people. A police station was reportedly set ablaze during the confrontation. In June, six were reportedly killed in a clash between rival cult gangs.

Odukpani

In 2016, many were reported killed and several displaced following renewed clashes over land disputes in Odukpani LGA. In September 2016, one was reportedly killed, and several houses and vehicles destroyed in communal clashes over land. In October, several villagers were displaced following clashes between Odukpani Qua town and New Netim town. In January 2017, five were killed in a clash between Ikot Offiong community in Odukpani LGA and Oku Iboku community, Akwa Ibom state. Clashes between the two communities continued into February, killing twenty. In April, over thirty were killed in renewed communal clashes between Ikot Offiong in Odukpani and Oku Iboku, Akwa Ibom state.

Yakurr

In 2016, communal tensions escalated in Yakurr LGA. In April 2016, at least 10 people, mainly children, women and the elderly were reportedly killed during a conflict over a land dispute. The

clash which occurred between Inyima and Onyadama communities in Obubra and Yakurr LGAs respectively, lasted for several days, and spilled over into other communities in Obubra. Later in that month, two were killed in a clash between Mkpani and Nko communities. Clashes between Nko and Mkpani continued up to June 2016, with estimated twenty deaths as well as vehicles and houses burnt. In the incidents between Mkpani and Nko militias, soldiers attempted to intervene by opening a road block, resulting in three deaths. Separately, a businessman who was a former LGA Councilor was assassinated in Ugep. Youths reacted to the assassination by looting shops belonging to other business owners in the area. In September 2016, several people were killed in renewed clashes between Inyima and Onyadama communities. In June 2017, two were reportedly killed in a clash between rival cult groups at the palace of a traditional ruler in the LGA.

Obubra

In September 2016, several people were killed in renewed clashes between Inyima and Onyadama communities in Obubra and Yakurr LGAs respectively. In January 2017, ten people were killed in hostilities between communities in Obubra. The clash was triggered by an alleged beheading of a man from a neighboring community, resulting in reprisal attacks. In March 2017, three people, including a pastor and his wife, were killed in a clash over land dispute between Iyमितet and Adun communities. In June 2017, four were killed during a clash between Nsobo community, Obubra LGA and Ofunakpa community in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi state.

Abi

In 2016, longstanding communal conflicts over land disputes escalated in Abi. In June 2016, five were killed in Adadama community, Abi LGA, in a retaliatory attack by members of Ochienyim community in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi state. In November, ten people were killed during a land dispute between Usumutong and Ediba communities. In December, a villager was killed and several others injured by an explosion. The explosion was reportedly related to renewed conflict over farmlands between Adadama community in Abi LGA and Amagu community in neighboring Ebonyi state.

Other LGAs

Bakassi

Conflict dynamics in Bakassi were significantly affected by the re-emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta in 2016. In September 2016, a soldier was killed in a gun battle with militants in Bakassi LGA. Separately, five members of the militant group, Bakassi Strike Force, were arrested by the Navy. In October, two members of the Bakassi Strike Force were killed by soldiers attached to the military task force, 'Operation Delta Safe'. In a separate incident, five militants and two pirates were killed by soldiers. In February 2017, about ten people were reportedly killed in a clash between militants and a criminal gang, although the details have been disputed.

Obanliku/Yala

The two LGAs experienced inter-communal land disputes in 2016. In July and August 2016, hundreds of people were displaced following a dispute over a farmland between five communities in Obanliku LGA. Homes, farmlands and property were reportedly destroyed during the clashes. In Yala, 15 people were reportedly injured and 11 homes burnt during an inter-communal clash in January 2016.

Obudu

In 2016-2017, Obudu experienced communal land disputes. In February 2016, one was killed in a suspected reprisal attack on a community. In January 2017, multiple were reported killed and several others injured in a clash over land dispute between a community in Obudu LGA and another in neighboring Benue state. Apart from communal conflict, the LGA has seen a handful of incidents of criminality. In March 2016, four suspected kidnapers were arrested over the abduction of a 6-year old pupil. In October 2016, the executive secretary of the Obudu Urban Development Authority was kidnapped.

Ikom/Ogoja

In Ikom, several people sustained injuries during a violent clash between Ochon and Otutop communities over a land dispute in September 2016. In Ogoja, a 56-year old businessman was shot dead by robbers in his residence in May 2017. The robbers reportedly stole large sum of money from the man. Separately, five were killed in a clash between rival cult groups in June 2017.

Akamkpa/Akpabuyo

In 2016, a handful of protests were reported in Akamkpa and Akpabuyo LGAs. In March, youths from both LGAs protested the poor quality of the road leading to the community where a Cement plant is located. In a separate incident, there were protests in Akamkpa over an alleged government plan to clear forest land to make way for the construction of a highway. In November 2016, youths in Akamkpa protested over alleged marginalization by a local company. In June 2017, four were killed in a clash over land dispute between Akamkpa and Ojor communities in Akamkpa LGA.

Implications and the Way Forward

The prevalence of communal conflicts and gang violence have implications for socio-economic development and security in the state. Communal conflicts and gang violence have progressively become security challenges, creating a climate of insecurity in the state. Communal conflicts have constrained the economic development of rural communities by disrupting economic activities, causing occupational displacements and economic decline. More systematically, communal conflicts have caused internal displacements, forced migration, as well as disruption of the social well being of the larger populations of the state. This may create hardship for rural communities and weaken farmers' interests, and lead to food insecurity if not properly addressed.

Recurrent communal conflicts have contributed to a culture of violence characterized by the proliferation of arms, the emergence of ethnic militias, vigilante groups, and a rise in gang violence and criminality. The rising wave of criminality in the state is also reinforced by the prevalence of street children, which has been linked to internal displacement resulting from extended communal conflicts in the state.

Inasmuch as communal conflict and gang violence in the state are the manifestation of interrelated drivers, the state government must collaborate with stakeholders to adopt a systemic approach that holistically addresses the underlying structures and factors that drives communal conflict and gang violence. Since communal conflict reinforces gang violence and criminality, there is a need for a multi-layered approach that address the problem holistically as follows.

First, government should collaborate with relevant stakeholders and civil society organizations to address the interrelated drivers of communal conflict and gang violence. The need for a multi-layered approach to address the inter-related drivers of criminality, gang violence and prevalence of street children cannot be over-emphasized especially in view of the 2019 elections. Secondly, the state government should collaborate with relevant stakeholders like PIND Foundation to create a community-based conflict early warning system, to identify and respond to potential triggers of conflict in the state.