



## The Akassa model

A proven process for improving life in the Niger Delta and beyond

**In 1997, Pro-Natura International pioneered a now world-recognised participatory development process in the Akassa Kingdom, on the southern tip of the Niger Delta**

It is an integrated development programme that tackles poverty, health and education, natural resources management and infrastructural needs. It encourages good governance at a grass roots level in a community where most people have little or no formal education.

By 2005, the Akassa model had already been adopted and adapted (as appropriate to local circumstances) by local communities in neighbouring Niger Delta States. To date, its community-driven process continues to influence others, be it in western Lagos State or Yobe State in north eastern Nigeria. One such community is the Eastern Obolo community in south eastern Akwa Ibom State.

Professor J.G. Frynas, specialist of Corporate Social Responsibility, has likened the Akassa model to 'best development practice' along the lines advocated by the World Bank or Oxfam.

**Guided by Bill Knight and Nalaguo Chris Alagoa, the process evolved out of a partnership between Pro-Natura and the BP/Statoil Alliance**

It began in 1997 with a Participatory Rural Appraisal programme that directly involved the local population, reaching now **180,000 people**, in the appraisal of their natural resources and other assets. Central to the process was the inclusion of the vulnerable and disadvantaged, traditionally 'invisible and unheard poorest-of-the-poor'. Women and youth were given a voice, and priority was given to their own perceived developmental wishes. They have participated in the planning, implementing and ultimately ownership of their own projects. While all these local actors played a part in the process, **the most important contribution to the success of the process was the support it received from women.**



*Bill Knight (right), OBE, original driving force behind the Akassa Development Programme*

## The Akassa Development Foundation has taken over

This corporate community-based organisation gradually took over Pro-Natura's facilitating role and so allowed it to exit. With the development of the community squarely placed on the shoulders of 'Ogbo' (local interest groups) which send representatives to the Foundation. An example of *Ogbo* is the Akassa Clan Women's Association. *Ogbo* are responsible for every stage of their projects, while the Foundation oversees the development initiatives.



*The Akassa Development Foundation secretariat*

Pro-Natura's training section provided the Foundation and *Ogbo* members with skills which were passed on by these experts to their peers in other communities. This has created the "living university" of Akassa.

## One of the key objectives of the Foundation has been to mobilise community members around sustainable practices

Crop production has been fostered as an alternative to fishing, focusing on rice, cassava and vegetable cultivation using an **agroecological approach**. Over 100 Akassa rice farmers short-listed for agricultural support benefits from government agricultural programme on rice cultivation and the Foundation has facilitated the creation of 4 rice farmers cooperative groups. In parallel, over 40 farmers have embraced cassava cultivation. Like the cassava farms, vegetable farms have good yields, including: pepper, okra, pumpkin-leaf, water-leaf, tomato, groundnut, watermelon and maize.



*Inatimi Odio, Executive Secretary, presents Akassa rice to the Commissioner of Environment*



*Cassava farm*



*Cassava harvest*

Over the last 2 years, the Akassa Development Foundation gave keen attention to the **conservation of natural resources and biodiversity**. The local club for conservation of turtle, created at the beginning of the project, metamorphosed to a holistic biodiversity conservation body. It does manatee, whale and dolphin protection; beach cleaning; bird watching, forestry regulation; control of artisanal fishing; and pollution monitoring. The Foundation has thus earned **government official recognition as a partner on environmental sustainability** and has co-hosted a virtual meeting to celebrate the 2021 World Wildlife Day.

---

## Innovation towards sustainable development

## One of the major developments following the Akassa model is the Eastern Obolo Community Development Foundation (EOCDF) developing an even more inclusive model

EOCDF was established in 2002. Eastern Obolo is a Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, Niger Delta. It includes 33 communities, with a total of **61,000 people**. The Eastern Obolo communities are all coastal but their fisheries are in decline. They are mostly composed of small-holder farm families cultivating mostly cassava, plantain, maize, oil palm, vegetable, pineapple, oranges, pawpaw etc.



*EOCDF facilities*



*Sampson Agba,  
Executive Secretary of EOCF*

EOCDF, employing 9 staff, is community-driven, facilitating integrated rural development projects, owned and implemented by interest groups, in line with community-perceived priorities. Those projects range from infrastructural projects, through agricultural, health and educational programs to micro-credit. The current priorities are focusing on climate-smart agriculture and mangroves protection and regeneration.

In particular, a plan was established to facilitate capacity-building for farmers to **adopt sustainable natural resources management practices**. One of the main levers was replanting trees within agroforestry systems to regenerate and conserve natural assets. A cooperative was also created to help local farmer associations create a platform where skills, experiences and resources are shared, where common problems can be identified and solved, and within which they can help each other.

## There is a need to find complementary funding for regenerating and protecting the coastal mangrove ecosystem

The Eastern Obolo Foundation is soliciting for both technical assistance and funding with which to regenerate, restore and protect our coastal mangrove ecosystem. This mangrove has been seriously damaged by an **extensive invasion of *Nypa palm*** and by external loggers removing mangrove wood for use as timber for construction work and as fuel for cooking.

In this context, Pro-Natura is looking for funding to **produce biochar out of *Nypa palm***. This would add value to this biomass while eradicating it, all to regenerate the mangrove.

## Extending the model to neighbouring communities

In 2015, the Foundation received a great unsolicited compliment. **Three other Local Government Areas asked to implement its development model in their communities.** This unprecedented invitation received the support of the Akwa Ibom State Government and partnership-funding support from Total Nigeria. The innovative approach will extend to the following communities: **Ibeno (105,000 people), Ikot Abasi (186,000 people), Mbo (144,000 people).**

Currently, while the need for capacity building still remains a community priority, it appears that there is a noticeable shift in communities' perceived priorities away from infrastructure projects and more on climate-smart agriculture, mangroves protection and regeneration and early childhood education for children of the poor.



*Sharing ideas*



*Learning skills*

Over the years and in support of its work with the communities, the EOCDP has received funding from the following organisations: Pro-Natura International, USAID, Oil industry, Ibom Power Company, Federal Ministry of Health, Conference of Directors of Rural Development and Agriculture Development Programme of Nigeria, Voluntary Service Overseas.

Pro-Natura International UK • 29 Downside Crescent, London NW3 2AN

Contact: [guy.reinaud@pronatura.org](mailto:guy.reinaud@pronatura.org)



---

Innovation towards sustainable development

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