



## **WITCHCRAFT (*IFOT*) ACCUSATIONS: MYTH OR REALITY? A FOCUS ON IKONETO VILLAGE IN ODUKPANI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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## Abstract

This study explores the socio-cultural implications of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto village, Odukpani Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. The objective of the study is to examine the extent to which these accusations stem from myths, superstition, and fear, rather than from any verifiable or empirical evidence. The study employs a qualitative research method, drawing on both primary and secondary sources, including scholarly journal articles, documented materials, and textbooks, as well as oral interviews and community reports. The study observed that witchcraft is largely a constructed belief system used to explain misfortune, illness, or death, and that such narratives disproportionately target vulnerable individuals, especially men and women, children, and the elderly. The consequences of these accusations often include social ostracism, psychological trauma, and, in extreme cases, physical harm or displacement. By situating the discussion within the Ikoneto experience, the study contributes to broader debates on human rights, cultural practices, and the tension between tradition and modernity in Africa. The study recommends a multi-stakeholder strategy to address the issue of witchcraft (*Ifot*) accusations involving traditional rulers, leaders of faith-based organisations, government authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. Key measures should be taken to include a community-wide awareness campaign against false accusations, enforcement of protective legal frameworks such as the Human Rights Law, integration of mental health education into public discourse, and the provision of psychosocial support to victims.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft (*Ifot*), Myth, Reality, Accusation, Odukpani, Nigeria.

## Introduction

In many African societies, witchcraft accusations have long been a contentious and culturally complex issue. Witchcraft is sometimes a deeply rooted part of traditional beliefs, attributing supernatural explanations to events like illness, death, or misfortune. However, in modern times, beliefs in witchcraft remain common in many rural areas, especially in communities with limited access to formal education and medical care. These beliefs continue to shape how traditional communities respond to hardship. Witchcraft accusations have affected social structures and often led to serious disputes within families and communities.

Historically, African societies have had diverse perspectives on witchcraft, with certain individuals or groups often singled out as possessing supernatural powers that could be used to cause harm or misfortune. In Odukpani, the practice of accusing individuals of witchcraft has historically been a tool to explain unfortunate events, punish social nonconformity, or resolve personal vendettas. These accusations disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly, who are often unable to defend themselves. This trend aligns with broader social dynamics seen in other parts of Nigeria and across Africa, where accusations of witchcraft are often levelled against those perceived as "outsiders" or those who do not fit societal norms (Bassey, 2015). In modern times, there has been a significant shift in attitudes



toward witchcraft accusations, with legal and human rights organisations advocating for the protection of accused individuals. Despite these changes, the persistence of witchcraft beliefs and accusations in rural communities like Ikoneto highlights ongoing challenges in bridging the gap between traditional beliefs and contemporary human rights standards. This research examines the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto, seeking to understand how these accusations have evolved over the years, particularly in the context of socioeconomic changes and educational improvements in Odukpani. It also explores the psychological and social impacts on individuals accused of witchcraft and assesses the measures put in place to address this phenomenon. Given this background, this research examines the issue of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto, exploring its dual dimensions as both myth and reality. Witchcraft accusations have often served as explanations for misfortune, illness, or societal discord in many African communities, raising questions about belief systems, cultural practices, and their impacts on human rights.

In Ikoneto, the problem of witchcraft accusations has lasted for decades and has had a major effect on the community's social cohesion and safety. These charges, which are frequently connected to unfortunate events, mysterious diseases, or fatalities, have resulted in violence, stigma, and even the eviction of suspects who are usually women, children, and the elderly. Although charges of witchcraft have long been a part of many African civilisations, there are not many comprehensive, locally focused studies that examine the unique dynamics and societal ramifications of these practices in Ikoneto. This vacuum poses a serious problem because little is known about the subtleties of the local customs, beliefs, and the influence of contemporary social shifts on the enduring prevalence of witchcraft accusations in the area. Specifically, the changing interplay among Ikoneto's traditional belief systems, education, and modernisation presents a chance for a thorough examination of whether accusations of witchcraft are based in myth or represent concrete social realities influenced by past and present events.

By offering an examination of witchcraft allegations in Ikoneto between 1990 and 2023, taking into account both traditional belief systems and contemporary influences, including education, legal frameworks, and economic conditions, findings from the study would offer a better explanation of the subject matter. Understanding the effects of witchcraft accusations on individuals and families, as well as how these accusations affect human rights, social cohesion, and community development in Odukpani L.G.A., is crucial. It is therefore imperative to critically examine the phenomenon of witchcraft to determine if the charges of witchcraft in Ikoneto are primarily mythological or based on the community's actual experiences.

## **An Overview of Witchcraft in Ikoneto**

Witchcraft has been a part of the cultural and spiritual life of the Ikoneto people, shaping their beliefs and practices for centuries. Historically, the concept of witchcraft in Ikoneto was deeply rooted in indigenous religious traditions, where the belief in the supernatural played a



significant role in explaining natural and social phenomena in the community. The people believed in an interconnected world where spirits, ancestors, and forces influenced their everyday life. Within this framework, witchcraft was often perceived as both a protective and destructive force, with individuals accused of using powers for personal gain or to harm others. The fear and reverence for witchcraft dictated social behaviours, norms, and even justice systems within the community.

In Ikoneto, witchcraft functioned as a tool for social control. A respondent known as Ekpenyong Effiong posits that witchcraft was commonly invoked to explain misfortunes such as crop failure, infertility, illnesses, or sudden deaths. In view of this, witchcraft accusations often targeted individuals who deviated from societal norms, such as the elderly, widows, or individuals who were perceived as outsiders. Such accusations often lead to severe punishments, including banishment or, in extreme cases, executions. It is worth noting that the fear of witchcraft served as a mechanism to enforce social cohesion, discouraging behaviours that were deemed unacceptable by the community. Moreover, spiritual leaders, such as diviners and traditional healers, played a role in identifying witches and prescribing rituals to neutralise their supposed powers. Witchcraft-related trials and public ceremonies were commonly held as a way of cleansing the community and restoring balance from time to time.

The advent of colonial rule brought significant changes to the perception and treatment of witchcraft in Ikonito. The introduction of Western legal frameworks and Christianity challenged traditional beliefs, often branding witchcraft as mere superstition. Colonial administrators sought to eradicate practices they deemed barbaric, implementing laws that criminalised witch trials and other related customs. Christian missionaries, in particular, were instrumental in reshaping local attitudes toward witchcraft, preaching against indigenous spiritual practices and promoting Western education as a means of enlightenment. However, these efforts did not entirely erase beliefs in witchcraft; rather, they forced them into more clandestine spaces, where they continued to influence social interactions and conflict resolutions. Secret societies and underground spiritual practitioners emerged, preserving these traditions in defiance of colonial influence (Bassey, 2015).

Changes in the law and religion made the issue of witchcraft in Ikoneto even more complex. Traditional procedures for dealing with witchcraft accusations were progressively weakened as colonial and post-colonial governments worked to create official legal systems. Witchcraft accusations-related violence continued despite the government's official opposition, frequently resulting in extrajudicial punishments or mob justice.

The belief in witchcraft was also strengthened by the later rise of Pentecostalism and other evangelical movements, but from a different angle. Charismatic pastors and self-styled prophets replaced traditional diviners in the role of identifying and exorcising witches, further solidifying the community's fear of supernatural harm. Religious crusades, healing services, and exorcisms became common, where individuals suspected of witchcraft were publicly identified and subjected to intense rituals aimed at casting out supposed evil spirits (Obinna, 2020).



Beyond its religious and social implications, witchcraft in Ikonito also had significant economic and political dimensions. Historically, witchcraft accusations were sometimes weaponised in disputes over land, inheritance, or chieftaincy positions. Wealthy individuals or ambitious leaders could be accused of using dark magic to amass power, leading to their ostracisation or even violent reprisals. In times of economic hardship, such as economic recessions, witchcraft accusations often increased as communities sought scapegoats for their struggles. This dynamic reveals how deeply intertwined witchcraft was with the socio-economic structures of Ikoneto, influencing everything from property distribution to governance. Additionally, women and marginalised individuals often bore the brunt of these accusations, as societal tensions manifested in gendered and class-based persecutions. The historical context of witchcraft in Ikoneto is one of continuity and change. While colonialism, Christianity, and modernisation have altered how witchcraft is perceived and addressed, the core belief in mystical forces remains deeply embedded in the cultural consciousness of the people.

### **Selected Cases of Witchcraft Accusation in Ikoneto**

Witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto have long been intertwined with the community's cultural, social, economic, and political fabric. These cases provide insight into how traditional beliefs are mobilised in times of crisis, rivalry, and social change. The following case studies illustrate different dimensions of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto by examining the individuals involved, the context of the allegations, community responses, and the consequences for the accused. For instance, Ekaette Nsiong was an Efik widow who became a victim of severe witchcraft accusations. The controversy began when Ekpenyong, a local trader embroiled in financial difficulties, alleged that Ekaette was using supernatural means to curse his business, which had recently suffered unexpected losses. His accusation emerged against a backdrop of a series of unexplained deaths and misfortunes in business, creating an atmosphere of widespread fear and uncertainty (Ekpenyong, 2019).

Local traditions and customary practices played a critical role in how the accusation unfolded. In response to the growing panic, community elders convened public meetings where they performed traditional rites and delivered verbal condemnations intended to identify and neutralise the perceived threat. These gatherings were not only a means of restoring order but also served as a form of communal judgment, reflecting deep-seated beliefs about the influence of malevolent supernatural forces in times of crisis.

Despite the collective effort to safeguard the community, the outcome for Ekaette was tragic. The elders, acting on the communal belief in the efficacy of traditional justice, subjected her to a trial by ordeal, a ritual designed to test her alleged supernatural powers. This process, rooted in centuries-old Efik judicial practices, ultimately led to her ostracism; Ekaette was forced to leave Ikoneto and live on its outskirts. Even though later interventions by local religious leaders managed to facilitate a partial reintegration into the community, the enduring stigma attached to her name





underscored how witchcraft accusations could have long-term social and personal repercussions. The Ekaette's case exemplifies the vast nature of witchcraft accusations in Efik society. It highlights how economic disputes, traditional power dynamics, and communal fears interweave to create a volatile environment where personal grievances can be masked as supernatural conflicts. Moreover, the use of ritualised trials, while intended to preserve social order, often leads to irreversible damage to the accused's reputation and social standing (Ekpenyong, 2019).



Fig 1: Ekaette's house at the outskirts of Ikoneto

Source: Field Research at Ikoneto, August, 2025.

Economic hardship and deeply rooted traditional beliefs often converge to produce potent witchcraft accusations, as illustrated by the case of Ekanem. A middle-aged Efik woman, Ekanem, who operated a modest trading post, became the target of an allegation during a period of significant economic downturn. Her rival, Ufot, a trader struggling to sustain his own business amid declining markets, leveraged the community's anxieties and superstitions to claim that Ekanem had employed witchcraft to sabotage his success. This allegation provided Ufot with a convenient scapegoat for his financial losses while resonating with a community already on edge due to hardship (Akpan, 2015).

Elders of the community had their meetings, and Obong Udoh and Chief Essien played a crucial role in amplifying the accusation. Their public denunciations, steeped in traditional customs and the belief in supernatural causation, quickly transformed the accusation into a communal affair. The ensuing fervour culminated in an enraged mob that not only destroyed Ekanem's trading post but also forced her into exile. Her property was confiscated, and her reputation was irreparably tarnished, underscoring how witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto can be wielded as powerful tools for settling economic scores and marginalising competitors.

This case also exemplifies the interplay between cultural beliefs and economic rivalries in Efik society. In times of financial distress, supernatural explanations become attractive, providing a socially acceptable means to channel collective frustrations. The case of Ekanem reveals that witchcraft accusations are not merely expressions of fear but are also strategically employed to



redistribute power and resources in a volatile economic environment. The severe consequences faced by Ekanem—social ostracism, loss of livelihood, and forced displacement, highlight the deep and lasting impact such accusations can have on individuals caught in the crossfire of traditional beliefs and modern economic challenges.

Lastly, traditional power dynamics and political rivalries often intersect to generate potent witchcraft accusations, as demonstrated by the case of Uyai. A community leader known for mediating local disputes and promoting social cohesion, Uyai suddenly found himself at the centre of a politically charged witchcraft allegation. The accusation was led by a faction of rival traditional healers and disaffected local elites, including figures like Ekong and Bassey, who saw his growing influence as a direct threat to their established authority. This faction rallied support by referencing deeply held Efik beliefs, claiming that supernatural forces were at work to weaken their power.

The context for the accusation was a period of significant transformation in Ikoneto, marked by a shifting balance of power. As emerging interests challenged long-standing authority, traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution were increasingly invoked to legitimise political manoeuvring. The accusers exploited this transitional moment, framing the dispute in spiritual terms to obscure the underlying political ambitions. The ensuing controversy saw the community split: long-time supporters of Uyai rallied to defend his impeccable record of fairness and leadership, while a more vocal segment insisted on a formal inquiry, demanding that traditional rituals be conducted to determine his culpability.

Despite the eventual exoneration of Uyai through these traditional processes, the ordeal inflicted lasting damage on his reputation and diminished his standing in local governance. The mere act of subjecting him to a ritualised inquiry, even one that ultimately vindicated him, eroded public trust and disrupted community cohesion. This case vividly illustrates how, in Efik society, witchcraft accusations can serve as an effective tool for politically motivated rivals. They not only enable the manipulation of communal beliefs for personal gain but also inflict deep social scars that persist even after the truth is restored. These case studies of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto reveal how deeply embedded cultural beliefs can be exploited to settle personal disputes, address economic grievances, and navigate power struggles. Each case highlights a different facet of the phenomenon, from economic rivalry and social ostracism to political manoeuvring, demonstrating that such accusations often serve broader social and political functions. The outcomes, which range from banishment and violence to lasting damage to social reputation, underscore the urgent need for more balanced legal and community-based mechanisms that protect individuals while addressing underlying conflicts.

## **The Role of Culture and Belief Systems in Ikoneto**

According to a respondent, Effiong Effiom, the phenomenon of witchcraft accusation in Ikoneto is rooted in a historical narrative that intertwines indigenous traditions, oral folklore, and



the community's collective memory. Long before the advent of globalisation, Ikoneto developed elaborate mythologies to explain events that defied easy explanation, such as sudden illnesses, unexplained deaths, or misfortunes in harvests. These narratives, passed down from generation to generation, provided not only a framework for understanding the inexplicable but also helped to reinforce social cohesion. By attributing such events to the malevolent work of witches, the community created a shared language for expressing and managing fear, uncertainty, and the pressures of daily life. This deeply ingrained historical perspective continues to influence contemporary attitudes, making witchcraft accusations a culturally sanctioned response to both personal and collective crises.

Effiong equally noted that witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto also serve as an instrument of social control, operating within a framework of power dynamics that reinforces existing social hierarchies. Drawing on labelling theory, these accusations often target individuals or groups who deviate from accepted social norms. For instance, those who are economically vulnerable, socially marginalised, or who simply challenge established traditions may be disproportionately accused of witchcraft. This process of labelling acts as a mechanism of exclusion, whereby the accused are stigmatised, ostracised, or even subjected to punitive actions, all of which serve to reinforce the dominant cultural values. The act of labelling someone as a witch, thereby not only explaining misfortune in a way that aligns with communal beliefs but also reinforcing social order by marking certain behaviours as unacceptable and those who exhibit them as outsiders.

In recent years, modern influences and the forces of globalisation have added new layers of complexity to the traditional witchcraft narrative in Ikoneto. Mass media and the internet have the power to amplify traditional stories, often sensationalising cases of witchcraft and spreading fear among communities. At the same time, exposure to scientific and rational discourse offers an alternative lens through which these phenomena can be understood, creating a tension between traditional belief systems and modern viewpoints. Economic hardships and rapid urbanisation further exacerbate this tension, as the stresses of modern life can lead communities to cling even more tightly to familiar, albeit archaic, explanatory models (Olatunji, 2021). In this way, modernity does not necessarily displace traditional beliefs; rather, it often reinforces them, as individuals seek solace in time-honoured narratives during periods of uncertainty and change. Oral history, folklore, and religious influences are all integral to Ikoneto culture and belief systems, which explain disasters and maintain social order. While contemporary pressures contradict and strengthen these ancient beliefs, labelling them as witches maintains adherence.

### **The Impacts of Witchcraft Accusations on Victims in Ikoneto**

Witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto have become a potent social crisis with far-reaching consequences. According to Ekpenyong, these accusations, often stemming from cultural beliefs, fear of the unknown, and a lack of scientific understanding of natural phenomena, continue to inflict severe harm on victims emotionally, socially, physically, and economically. In Ikoneto, such accusations frequently target vulnerable individuals, especially elderly women, widows,





stepchildren, or those suffering from mental illness or physical deformities, leading to devastating outcomes.

One of the consequences of witchcraft accusations is social ostracisation and stigmatisation. The moment an individual is accused of being a witch, they are immediately branded as evil, dangerous, or spiritually unclean to be with other people in the community (Ifeoma, 2019). This label isolates them from the rest of the community, as people fear association with someone believed to have supernatural powers capable of causing harm. In most cases, the accused are evicted from their homes, excommunicated by relatives, and forced to live in isolation, often in farmlands, uncompleted buildings, or forest edges without food, shelter, or protection.

The ostracisation is particularly harsh on elderly women, who are commonly accused due to their age, widowhood, or perceived odd behaviour. For example, Rose Emem, a trader, was charged with causing a neighbour's illness. She was publicly humiliated, dragged out of her compound, and dumped at the outskirts of the village. None of her children came to her defence out of fear of being labelled accomplices. Even after local officials intervened and found no evidence against her, she was never accepted back into the community. This shows how the damage caused by stigma is often permanent.

Furthermore, social exclusion means that the accused lose access to communal support systems such as food-sharing networks, cooperative societies, religious gatherings, and even healthcare. They are treated with contempt and avoided as though they carry a spiritual infection. Community members, especially the youth, are taught to fear and disrespect them.

Moving on, the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by victims of witchcraft accusations is often deep, long-lasting, and sometimes irreversible. Being labelled a witch is not only a social condemnation, it is a mental and emotional assault. These accusations are typically sudden, public, and humiliating, causing the accused to experience intense shock, fear, and confusion. Many victims describe the experience as a living nightmare, especially when they are subjected to violent "cleansing" rituals or community ridicule.

In most cases, victims suffer from anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and in extreme instances, suicidal ideation. The trauma is worsened by the fact that these accusations usually come from family members, neighbours, or close associates, people the victims trusted. This betrayal leads to emotional breakdowns and a deep sense of abandonment (Olatunji, 2021). Victims often internalise the stigma, even when they know they are innocent, because the entire community treats them as guilty. For instance, a 14-year-old boy was accused by his stepmother of causing her miscarriages through "spiritual manipulation." The boy was chained for days, beaten repeatedly by a local spiritualist, and forced to confess to crimes he did not understand. Though later exonerated by a rights organisation, the psychological damage lingered. He developed night terrors, refused to speak for weeks, and displayed extreme fear at the sight of adults. His schooling was interrupted, and he became socially withdrawn.



In another case, an elderly woman who had lost her husband and only child was accused of killing them through witchcraft. She became severely depressed, refused food, and had to be hospitalised. These stories are not isolated. They represent a wider pattern in Ikoneto, where victims are left emotionally scarred with little or no access to counselling, support, or justice.

Economic disempowerment is often an overlooked consequence of witchcraft accusations in Ikonito. Once someone is labelled a witch, their ability to earn a living is almost immediately destroyed. This is because the stigma attached to such accusations affects not only the individual's social standing but also their economic relationships. In tightly knit communities like Ikoneto, reputation is central to economic activity, and a single accusation can shatter years of hard-earned trust. Market traders are particularly vulnerable when accused. Customers avoid buying from accused individuals, fearing that their goods may be "cursed" or spiritually harmful. This fear is often reinforced by traditional beliefs and local spiritual leaders who validate such claims without evidence. For example, a middle-aged widow in Ikoneto who sold palm oil and local spices in the market was accused of using "dark powers" to attract customers. Her competitors, possibly motivated by jealousy, encouraged the accusation. Within days, her stall was burned, and she was chased out of the market. She lost all her capital, inventory, and credibility, with no access to legal compensation or community support.

Farmers also suffer from these accusations. Their produce is sometimes avoided in the market or destroyed by angry mobs who believe they are using supernatural means to harm others or the environment. Others are denied access to communal land or farming cooperatives, effectively cutting them off from their only means of survival. Beyond the immediate loss of income, victims often face long-term poverty. Many are unable to recover economically because they are excluded from communal saving schemes, barred from market associations, and denied credit. Women, especially widows and single mothers, are often affected due to their already fragile economic position.

## **Responses to Witchcraft Accusations in Ikoneto**

In any community marked by strong traditional and spiritual beliefs, the response to witchcraft accusations is often severe. These responses reflect deeply embedded cultural norms, religious influences, and the community's collective desire to protect itself from perceived spiritual harm. However, over the years, a growing movement of advocacy and reform spearheaded by civil society groups, legal institutions, and enlightened community members has begun to challenge these practices (Olatunji, 2019).

To begin with, traditional and cultural responses to witchcraft accusations are often violent and exclusionary. When someone is suspected of being a witch, community members, motivated by fear or superstition, may resort to public humiliation, physical abuse, or even forced exile of the accused. In many cases, local traditional healers, or "witch doctors", perform harmful rituals



under the guise of exposing or cleansing witches. For example, a widow in Ikoneto may be accused of causing unexplained deaths in her neighbourhood and could be dragged before a shrine or forced to undergo rituals involving scarification or the ingestion of dangerous substances. These practices not only violate human rights but also isolate the accused from family and communal support systems.

Furthermore, religious institutions, particularly some Pentecostal churches, have been known to amplify fears around witchcraft. Certain pastors or prophets use “deliverance sessions” to single out individuals, often children, the elderly, or mentally ill persons, and brand them witches in need of exorcism. In some churches, children have been beaten or abandoned after being accused of spiritually attacking their families. However, not all religious leaders uphold these practices. There is a growing segment of faith leaders advocating against witch-branding. For instance, organisations like the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), based in Akwa Ibom State, collaborate with churches to discredit the spiritual legitimacy of child witchcraft accusations and promote biblical messages of compassion and non-violence (Obinna, 2020).

In response to the human rights crisis resulting from these accusations, civil society organisations have played a vital role. Groups such as the Basic Rights Counsel Initiative (BRCI) and Stepping Stones Nigeria have been instrumental in documenting abuses, advocating for victims, and providing safe spaces for those affected, particularly children. These NGOs offer legal support, psychosocial counselling, and reintegration programs for victims. Through community outreach and education campaigns, they also challenge traditional beliefs and promote scientific and psychological explanations for behaviour often attributed to witchcraft, such as epilepsy, schizophrenia, or autism.

Alongside civil society efforts, government and law enforcement responses have been mixed but slowly improving. Although Nigeria’s legal framework criminalises abuse and harmful practices, local enforcement is often weak due to corruption, fear of backlash, or complicity with traditional authorities. Nevertheless, advocacy has led to notable successes. Within Ikoneto, local educators, youth groups, and progressive elders are creating platforms for open dialogue about witchcraft-related issues. These fora emphasise education on mental health, social inequality, and intergenerational conflict as root causes of behaviour often mistaken for witchcraft. Through storytelling, local theatre, and town hall meetings, these initiatives seek to demystify superstition and promote empathy. Such community engagement is essential for reshaping long-held beliefs and preventing future accusations. Community responses to witchcraft accusations in Ikonito reflect both the persistence of harmful traditional practices and the rise of resistance from reform-minded actors. While superstition and religious extremism continue to fuel fear and violence, the work of NGOs like CRARN and BRCI, alongside evolving government action and grassroots education, is beginning to shift the narrative.



## Conclusion

Witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto have remained a major social concern between 1990 and 2023. These accusations are often triggered by personal misfortunes, unexplained deaths, or illnesses, with victims typically being the elderly, widows, children, and individuals with mental or physical disabilities. The accusations are largely fueled by deep-rooted traditional beliefs, ignorance, fear, and socio-economic challenges such as poverty and lack of access to healthcare and education. Victims suffer severe consequences, including physical violence, psychological trauma, banishment, and in some cases, death. Such stigmatisation not only ruins individual lives but also tears apart families and weakens the fabric of the community. While some religious and traditional leaders contribute to these abuses through harmful exorcism practices, others have begun advocating for change. In response, NGOs such as the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) and the Basic Rights Counsel Initiative (BRCI) have played vital roles in addressing the issue. They provide shelter, legal support, psychosocial care, and public sensitisation programs aimed at protecting victims and eradicating harmful cultural practices.

Despite these efforts, witchcraft accusations persist due to enduring beliefs, weak legal enforcement, and socio-economic instability. For sustainable change, a multifaceted approach is essential, one that includes legal reform, community education, economic empowerment, and stronger collaboration between civil society, government agencies, and faith leaders. The issue of witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto underscores the urgent need for holistic interventions to address the deep-rooted cultural and societal factors sustaining this harmful practice. Over the years, the persistent targeting of vulnerable individuals, particularly women, children, and the elderly, has revealed the alarming extent to which superstition, fear, and misinformation continue to influence community behaviour. Despite existing human rights laws, state legislation, and the efforts of NGOs and religious reformers, the prevalence of witch-branding suggests that current approaches remain inadequate. Effectively addressing witchcraft accusations in Ikoneto requires a multi-stakeholder strategy involving traditional leaders, faith-based institutions, government authorities, educators, and civil society organisations. Key measures should include community-wide awareness campaigns, the enforcement of protective legal frameworks such as the Child Rights Law, the integration of mental health education into public discourse, and the provision of psychosocial support to victims. Furthermore, empowering community members through education, economic opportunities, and intergenerational dialogue can help shift harmful mindsets and reduce the reliance on scapegoating as a response to misfortune.

A coordinated, compassionate, and justice-driven approach is essential for dismantling the culture of fear and restoring dignity to those wrongly accused. Only through sustained collaboration and cultural reorientation can Ikoneto truly move beyond the cycle of witchcraft accusations, ensuring a more humane, inclusive, and progressive future for all residents of the community.



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