

RE-EXAMINING PEACEMAKING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PEACE BUILDING AND PROCESS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the Southeast region of Nigeria, conflicts between various ethnic groups, have been prevalent in recent years. These conflicts have resulted in displacement, economic disruption, and the loss of lives and properties. Despite various peace-building and conflict management efforts by the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, and international bodies, conflicts continue to occur in Nigeria. It is necessary to re-examine the current peacemaking and conflict management approaches to identify the gaps, especially from the youth population which has not receive much attention. The methodology adopted is the content analysis approach. The paper adopted the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as its theoretical framework. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding the role of group identity in conflict and peacebuilding. The findings of the study revealed that youths have the potential to play an important role in peacebuilding and conflict management in South-East Nigeria. The paper concludes that there is a need to involve young people in peace-building efforts as well as to promote their participation. It recommends that youths should be involved in decision-making processes at all levels of government and civil society as this can help to ensure that their voices are heard and their perspectives considered in policies that affect them.

Keywords: Peacemaking, Peacebuilding, Conflict management, Youth, South-East, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The history of Nigeria has been characterized by various forms of conflicts ranging from ethno-religious clashes, political violence, to communal conflicts, which have resulted in the loss of lives and properties (Okolie, 2018). The conflict in Nigeria has been attributed to several factors, including resource control, ethno-religious intolerance, and political marginalization, among others (Uzoечи & Nwankwo, 2020). In the Southeast region of Nigeria, conflicts between various ethnic groups, have been prevalent in recent years. The Southeast region of Nigeria is home to various ethnic groups, including the Igbo, the Efik, and the Ibibio, among others. The region has witnessed various forms of conflicts, including conflicts between farmers and herders, inter-communal conflicts, and political violence, among others (Umejesi, 2019). These conflicts have resulted in displacement, economic disruption, and the loss of lives and properties (Ibeanu & Otutu, 2020). Despite various peace-building and conflict management efforts by the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, and international bodies, conflicts continue to occur in Nigeria. There is a need to re-examine the current peacemaking and conflict management approaches to identify the gaps and the opportunities to involve other actors

who can contribute to peace-building efforts. One such group that has not received much attention is the youth population. As Adedeji (2018) puts it, young people have often been marginalized in peace processes and conflict management efforts, with their contributions overlooked or undervalued.

The exclusion of young people from peace-building efforts is a missed opportunity to tap into the potential of a significant population in Nigeria. The youth population in Nigeria represents a significant proportion of the population, with estimates indicating that over 60% of Nigerians are below the age of 30 (Population Reference Bureau, 2021). Therefore, the role of youth in peace-building and conflict management cannot be underestimated. Young people have the potential to contribute to peace-building processes in various ways, including promoting dialogue, inter-group understanding, and community building (UN, 2015). In south-east Nigeria, there is a need to explore the role of young people in peace-building and conflict management and to identify ways to promote their participation in such efforts.

The aim of this study is to re-examine the current peacemaking and conflict management approaches in Southeast Nigeria, and to identify the role of youth in peace-building and conflict management.

The paper is segmented into five sections, beginning with the introduction. The second section clarifies the relevant concepts, while the third section explains the methodology used. The fourth section discussed the subject matter, while the fifth section concludes the paper.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: Peace Making and Peace Building

Peacemaking in Nigeria refers to the efforts aimed at resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence among different groups in the country. Nigeria is a diverse country, with over 250 ethnic groups, and has experienced various forms of conflicts, including inter-communal conflicts, political violence, religious conflicts, and conflicts between farmers and herders, among others (Olonisakin, 2015). According to Licklider (2020), peacemaking is "the process of bringing parties to a conflict to the negotiating table and facilitating the resolution of the conflict through dialogue and compromise."

According to Svensson and Wallensteen (2020), peacemaking is the proactive process of starting, facilitating, and maintaining negotiations with the goal of resolving disputes and producing peaceful solutions. According to Galtung and Richmond (2020), peacemaking is a dynamic and interactive process that entails the recognition and transformation of conflict's underlying causes, the development of mutual trust between parties, and the negotiation of a lasting peace deal.

Lederach (2015) defines peacemaking as the art of intervening in conflicts in ways that change interpersonal dynamics, address underlying grievances, and pave the road for enduring peace is known as peacemaking. According to Wall (2019), peacemaking is a process of reconciliation that entails altering interpersonal dynamics and resolving disputes via discussion, negotiation, and compromise.

Since peacebuilding requires peace, it is impossible to achieve peace without it. In other words, as peace can only be built upon when it already exists, peace is crucial or at the core of peacebuilding. Since there is no consensus among academics on what constitutes an appropriate definition of "peace," the concept has been defined in a number of different ways. The word "pax," which means a treaty, pact, or agreement to end a war, dispute, or conflict between or among people, groups of people, or states in Latin, is the source of the expression. Also, it promotes tranquillity in general. To put it another way, for there to be peace, there needs to be an atmosphere devoid of tumult and confusion, with no restrictions or barriers preventing people from going about their daily lives.

Peace is defined by Ibeanu (2006) as initiatives to minimize conflict and promote development in specific societies and the larger international community. Thus, peace is essential for ensuring social, political, and economic advancement. Ahamfule (2013) defined a condition of peace as one without war, in which nobody is upset by others, and in which there is tranquillity, free from fears or anxiety.

Brinkmann (2006) defined peacebuilding as the transformation of a violent state or situation into one that fosters better political, socioeconomic equality, justice, fairness, and security for all people within a diverse cultural milieu. Brinkmann takes it a step further by identifying two parts of peacebuilding. He asserts that the first component of peacebuilding is focused on lessening or modifying violence, while the second part of peacebuilding is focused on enhancing already existing peaceful activities or to inspire new ones. The importance of timing should be emphasized when planning and carrying out peacebuilding activities because some will provide beneficial results straight away while others won't be obvious for some time.

Boutros-Ghali (1992) asserts that peacebuilding acts as a conduit for the repair of places or things harmed by conflict. It is a process of identifying and fostering those institutions that will reinforce, bolster, and cement peace in order to prevent a return into war. According to Doyle and Sambanis (1999), peacebuilding requires "the prior establishment of a minimal level of peace." To put it another way, while upholding peace is crucial to establishing it, failing to do so will have the opposite effect by calcifying a conflict over time and making peacebuilding challenging.

According to Lederach (1997), peacebuilding is a "long-term, gradual, and sustainable process that seeks to address the root causes of violent conflict and to create a social system that is just, equitable, and peaceful." Galtung (1996) defines peacebuilding as "the establishment of structures and systems that provide for the resolution of conflicts without resorting to violence, and that address the root causes of conflict in a way that promotes justice, human rights, and sustainable development." Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2016) describe peacebuilding as "the use of non-violent methods to manage and transform conflicts, to address the underlying causes of violence, and to promote a sustainable and just peace."

Paris and Sisk (2009) define peacebuilding as "the deliberate and sustained effort to prevent the outbreak, recurrence, or continuation of violent conflict, and to address its

root causes through a range of political, social, and economic strategies." According to Bercovitch and Jackson (2009), peacebuilding involves "a broad range of activities that aim to create conditions that are conducive to peaceful relations among parties in conflict, and to prevent, manage, or resolve conflicts in a manner that promotes reconciliation, justice, and social change."

Conflict Management

Conflict management, according to Coleman and Ferguson (2015), is the act of recognizing, discussing, and resolving conflicts or disagreements that develop between people, groups, or organizations in a way that is positive, courteous, and mutually beneficial. Conflict management, according to Gurr and Cole (2019), is the proactive and reactive work done by both individuals and groups to avoid, control, and settle disagreements and conflicts. Conflict management is the art of handling disagreements and conflicts in a way that reduces the likelihood of violence, addresses the root causes of the conflict, and fosters collaboration and cooperation between parties, according to Kriesberg (2020).

According to Moore (2014), the process of developing and putting into practice tactics that allow disputing parties to converse amicably, comprehend one another's viewpoints, and work toward a mutually agreeable resolution. Conflict management is the act of handling conflicts, disagreements, or differences between people, groups, or organizations using a range of strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, according to Wall and Callister (2017). Conflict management, according to Rahim (2017), is the act of detecting, addressing, and resolving conflicts or disputes that arise between individuals or organizations utilizing a range of approaches, such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

By controlling how parties interact, communicate, and bargain with one another, Wilmot and Hocker (2018) describe conflict management as the process of minimizing the negative effects of conflict and maximizing its positive potential. According to Lederach (2015), the practice of handling conflict in a way that fosters connections, comprehension, and original problem-solving rather than confrontation or violence. According to Deutsch (2017), conflict management is the process of addressing and resolving disagreements between parties with the aim of achieving a win-win outcome.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study is qualitative. Data were gathered from secondary sources like journals, official websites, and literary works, documentary and newspapers. Every single piece of information gathered for this study is pertinent to it. Content analysis and thematic approach were largely engaged.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as its theoretical framework. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding the role of youth in peacemaking and conflict management. SIT posits that people's social identity, or the groups to which

they belong, can shape their attitudes and behaviours towards in-group and out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the context of this research topic, youth in South-East Nigeria may identify with different social groups based on their ethnicity, religion, and regional affiliations. These social identities can influence their attitudes and behaviours towards people from other groups, and in turn, can impact conflict and peacebuilding efforts.

According to SIT, people strive to maintain a positive social identity, which can involve favouring their in-group over out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This can lead to inter-group conflict, as groups may compete for resources and status. In the context of South-East Nigeria, conflicts have been attributed to factors such as resource control, ethno-religious intolerance, and political marginalization (Uzoечи & Nwankwo, 2020). These factors can exacerbate inter-group tensions and lead to violence.

However, SIT also suggests that people can adopt a superordinate identity that transcends their individual group identities and fosters cooperation between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the context of South-East Nigeria, youth can potentially adopt a shared identity as Nigerians that transcends their regional, ethnic, and religious identities. This superordinate identity can facilitate collaboration and cooperation in peacemaking efforts.

Moreover, SIT proposes that inter-group contact can reduce prejudice and improve inter-group relations, particularly when certain conditions are met, such as equal status between groups and common goals (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In the context of South-East Nigeria, youth from different social groups can work together towards common goals such as promoting peace and reducing violence. This can help to break down inter-group barriers and promote cooperation.

The theory highlights the ways in which group membership can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, including in the context of conflict and peacebuilding (Haslam, 2001). Social Identity Theory can be useful for identifying potential avenues for promoting intergroup harmony and reducing conflict. By recognizing the importance of social identity in shaping intergroup behaviour, interventions can be designed to target specific aspects of identity that may contribute to conflict (Haslam, 2001). For example, efforts to promote a shared sense of national identity may help to reduce ethnic or regional tensions in Nigeria.

One potential weakness of social identity theory is that it may oversimplify the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict. Conflict can arise from a wide range of factors beyond just group identity, including economic, political, and historical factors (Bar-Tal, 2013). Focusing solely on group identity may therefore overlook other important factors that contribute to conflict.

Additionally, social identity theory has been criticized for being too deterministic and emphasizing the role of group membership in shaping behaviour, rather than individual agency (Bar-Tal, 2013). This may overlook the ways in which individuals can resist or

challenge group norms and identities.

The theory is, however appropriate to the study as provides a useful framework for understanding the role of group identity in conflict and peacebuilding. It also emphasizes the importance of social categorization and identification in shaping intergroup behaviour.

PEACEMAKING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Peacemaking and conflict management in South East Nigeria have been ongoing issues due to various factors such as resource control, political marginalization, and ethno-religious intolerance (Uzoechi & Nwankwo, 2020). The region has experienced violent conflicts over the years, including the Biafran War, the Niger Delta militancy, and the clashes between farmers and herders.

One of the key challenges to peacemaking and conflict management in the region has been the involvement of youth in violent activities. However, youth can also play a critical role in peacebuilding and conflict management through various strategies. One such strategy is the involvement of youth in peace dialogues, which can help to bridge the gap between conflicting groups (Onuoha, 2020). Additionally, youth-led initiatives can be effective in building trust and promoting reconciliation among communities affected by conflict (Bergenwall & Nilsson, 2020).

Efforts to promote peace and stability in South East Nigeria have also involved the government and various stakeholders. For instance, the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was aimed at addressing the economic and social marginalization of the region (Ibekwe, 2020). Additionally, the government has set up various peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms such as the National Peace Committee and the National Human Rights Commission (Uzoechi & Nwankwo, 2020). The government and international organizations have made efforts to address conflicts in the region through various initiatives, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, peace conferences, and peacebuilding projects (Uzoechi & Nwankwo, 2020). However, these efforts have not fully addressed the underlying issues causing conflicts, such as political marginalization, ethnic tensions, and resource control.

In addition, the role of youth in peacemaking and conflict management has not been fully recognized. Youth in the region have been affected by the conflicts, with many being recruited into armed groups or being displaced from their homes. However, they also have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding efforts, as they have the energy, creativity, and innovative ideas to tackle the root causes of conflicts (Okeke, 2019).

Despite efforts by the government, peacemaking and conflict management in South East Nigeria continue to face challenges. Some of these challenges include limited resources for peacebuilding initiatives, weak institutional frameworks, and political instability (Onuoha, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for continued efforts towards sustainable peacebuilding and conflict management in the region.

THE ROLES OF YOUTHS IN PEACEBUILDING IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

The roles of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management in South East Nigeria are varied and complex. Below are some of the key roles that youth can play in these processes, along with relevant in-text citations and references:

- **Bridging divides between communities:** Youth can act as bridges between different communities by promoting dialogue, building relationships, and creating networks for peace (Okorie & Chukwuocha, 2021). By doing so, they can help to reduce tensions and foster greater understanding between groups.
- **Promoting non-violent conflict resolution:** Youth can promote non-violent conflict resolution strategies, such as mediation, negotiation, and dialogue, which can help to de-escalate conflicts and reduce the likelihood of violence (Onyekwelu et al., 2019). They can also advocate for peaceful means of conflict resolution and work to prevent the spread of rumors and misinformation that can fuel violence.
- **Advocating for social justice:** Youth can play a key role in advocating for social justice and addressing the root causes of conflict, such as inequality, poverty, and discrimination. They can mobilize for change, raise awareness of injustices, and promote policies and programs that address these issues (Uzoechi & Nwankwo, 2020).
- **Building resilience:** Youth can build resilience in their communities by promoting a sense of cohesion, hope, and empowerment. They can engage in activities such as community service, sports, and cultural events that help to foster a sense of pride and unity (Akpan, 2018). By doing so, they can help to build a stronger foundation for peace and reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- **Providing alternative narratives:** Youth can provide alternative narratives to violent extremism and promote peaceful and inclusive ideologies. They can use social media and other platforms to counter extremist messaging and promote messages of tolerance, diversity, and peace (Ezeibe & Umezina, 2020).

The role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management in Southeast Nigeria can also be analyzed through the lens of participatory approaches to peacebuilding. Participatory approaches involve involving all stakeholders, including marginalized groups like youth, in decision-making processes related to peacebuilding and conflict management (Lederach, 1997). This approach emphasizes the importance of local ownership and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts, as well as the need for inclusive processes that take into account the needs and perspectives of all members of a community.

Youth can play a crucial role in participatory approaches to peacebuilding and conflict management by providing their unique perspectives, skills, and energy to peacebuilding efforts (Obi, 2012). They can serve as mediators, facilitators, and ambassadors for peace in their communities, and can help bridge divides between different groups. Youth can also contribute to conflict prevention efforts by engaging in dialogue and promoting

understanding between groups, as well as by identifying and addressing root causes of conflict.

Furthermore, youth-led peacebuilding initiatives have the potential to be more effective and sustainable than top-down approaches, as they are more likely to take into account the specific needs and concerns of young people and other marginalized groups (UNDP, 2016). By empowering youth to take an active role in peacebuilding and conflict management, communities can build resilience and create a more peaceful and equitable society.

Overall, the role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management in Southeast Nigeria is multifaceted and complex, and requires a comprehensive and participatory approach that takes into account the unique perspectives and contributions of young people. By leveraging the strengths and capabilities of youth, communities in Southeast Nigeria can build more sustainable and peaceful futures.

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Understanding the role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, youth constitute a significant proportion of the population in many conflict-affected regions, and their involvement in peacebuilding efforts can contribute to sustainable peace (Agbiboa, 2015). The World Bank (2018) added to this when it asserted that Youth represent a significant proportion of the population in many conflict-affected countries, and their engagement in peacebuilding can help prevent the recurrence of violence and promote social cohesion. Secondly, youth are often the most affected by conflict, with many being exposed to violence, displacement, and other forms of trauma. Engaging youth in peacebuilding efforts can provide them with opportunities to address the root causes of the conflict and promote healing and reconciliation (United Nations, 2015).

In addition, in the lenses of Agbiboa (2015), youth have unique perspectives and experiences that can contribute to more effective and sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Their perspective can act as complement the perspectives of older generations and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes (Barnes & Dovey, 2018). They often have a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and political dynamics of their communities, and can therefore play a critical role in designing and implementing peacebuilding interventions that are context-specific and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Engaging youth in peacebuilding efforts can help to address the social and economic exclusion that often contributes to conflict. By providing young people with opportunities to participate in peacebuilding activities, they can develop important skills and networks that can contribute to their social and economic well-being, while also promoting social cohesion and community development (United Nations, 2015).

FINDINGS

From the reviewed literature, it can be inferred that youth have the potential to play an important role in peacebuilding and conflict management in South-East Nigeria. Moussaoui and Adwan (2017), and Oduwole and Abiodun (2019) further corroborated this when they admitted that youth are often the most affected by conflicts and are also seen as the most active agents of change in building sustainable peace.

Furthermore, it has been found that the involvement of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management can have positive effects on inter-group relations, increase social cohesion, and promote sustainable development (Bajaj & de Souza, 2018; Hunte & Lashley, 2020). However, challenges such as youth marginalization, lack of access to resources, and political instability can hinder their participation in peacebuilding and conflict management efforts.

CONCLUSION

Peacemaking in Nigeria remains a critical issue, and there is a need for more effective and sustainable approaches to conflict resolution. The involvement of local communities and non-state actors, including young people, is essential for the success of peacemaking efforts in Nigeria. The study has contributed to the existing literature on peace-building and conflict management, particularly in the context of Nigeria. It highlighted the need to involve young people in peace-building efforts as well as how to promote their participation. The study findings is relevant to policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in peace-building and conflict management in Nigeria. In general, the roles of youth in peacebuilding and conflict management are diverse and dynamic, and depend on various factors such as the context, the nature of the conflict, and the resources available. However, by engaging in these activities, youth can contribute significantly to building sustainable peace in South East Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After considering several literatures and analysing the contents, the following suggestions are made by the paper:

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should prioritize youth inclusion in peace building and conflict management initiatives by providing resources and support to empower youth leaders and community-based organizations.
2. Efforts should be made to promote dialogue among different ethnic and religious groups in South-East Nigeria. Such dialogue can help to build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and promote peaceful coexistence.
3. Education and economic opportunities are critical factors in reducing poverty, which is often a root cause of conflict. Therefore, efforts should be made to increase access to education and economic opportunities for young people in South-East Nigeria.
4. Conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and negotiation, should be strengthened and made more accessible to youth in South-East Nigeria. This can help to prevent conflicts from escalating and reduce the impact of existing conflicts.

Youth should be involved in decision-making processes at all levels of government and civil society. This can help to ensure that their voices are heard and their perspectives are considered in policies that affect them.

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