



PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE STAKEHOLDERS (Socio-Ethical Perspectives)

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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of stability and social harmony is an urgent priority in contemporary society, particularly within the Nigerian context. Recently, there has been a noticeable escalation in reports concerning disputes, communal clashes, and outright warfare across various communities and states within the federation. This trend has raised significant alarm among religious authorities, traditional custodians, and political figures alike. Consequently, this inquiry scrutinizes specific catalysts of conflict within Nigerian communities and the broader state structure. It rigorously analyzes the obstacles impeding effective peacebuilding while profiling the essential actors capable of fostering stability. Findings indicate that ethnic divisions, distorted religious practices, struggles over natural resource control, and insufficient youth empowerment are primary drivers of discord. Additional friction points include land tenure systems, boundary disputes, inheritance rights, religious bigotry, and political maneuvering. Furthermore, the analysis highlights a historical failure by successive administrations to adequately engage the youth population, rendering them vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent groups. The paper posits that a collaborative approach involving political leaders, security agencies, the business community, civil society, international bodies, the media, professionals, religious organizations, and traditional institutions is vital for sustainable peace. Drawing on secondary data and observational analysis, this paper recommends that active stakeholder engagement is the prerequisite for achieving lasting peace, socio-economic vitality, and robust political evolution in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Conflict Transformation, Stakeholder Engagement, Nigerian Stability, Socio-Ethical Integration, Youth Restiveness, Resource Control.*

INTRODUCTION

Establishing a stable peace is widely recognized as an urgent imperative in the modern world, and nowhere is this more critical than in Nigeria. The national landscape is currently saturated with distressing reports of disputes, internecine conflicts, and outbreaks of war affecting numerous communities and states. This escalating trajectory of violence has become a profound source of anxiety for leadership across all sectors, including religious hierarchies, traditional councils, and political administrations.

The focus of this inquiry, therefore, is to dissect the specific elements that cultivate hostility within Nigerian societies. The paper aims to deconstruct the factors that obstruct the peacebuilding process while simultaneously identifying the various stakeholders who bear the responsibility for restoring order.

The investigation reveals that the root causes of these conflicts are multifaceted, stemming largely from ethnic tribalism, a lack of genuine religious ethics, struggles over the control of natural wealth, and a chronic failure to empower the younger generation. Beyond these primary factors, the society is plagued by disputes regarding land ownership, demarcation of boundaries, inheritance rights, religious intolerance, youth unemployment, and aggressive political ambitions.

Furthermore, the assessment uncovered a troubling pattern where successive governments have neglected the welfare and engagement of the youth. This neglect has created a reservoir of frustrated individuals who are easily conscripted into insurgent activities. It is the position of this paper that a wide array of stakeholders—ranging from state and political actors, security forces, and economic entrepreneurs to civil society groups, international bodies, media outlets, professional guilds, religious bodies, and traditional institutions—possess the collective power to drive successful peacebuilding initiatives.

Data for this research was derived from secondary sources and the researcher's longitudinal observations. Ultimately, the paper submits that the proactive involvement of these diverse stakeholders is the catalyst needed to facilitate peace, drive effective socio-economic expansion, and ensure viable political development in Nigeria.

PEACE AND PEACE-BUILDING: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Peace represents one of humanity's most valuable assets. Fundamentally, it describes the existence of cordial, harmonious relationships among individuals, whether within a tight-knit community or the broader society. However, in the contemporary Nigerian context, conflict has emerged as the most formidable adversary to this harmony. Paradoxically, conflict can sometimes serve as a revelation, forcing a society to recognize the indispensable value of tranquility. Since the dawn of history, families, nations, and international bodies have navigated wars and disputes, necessitating the evolution of peacemaking and peacebuilding mechanisms to resolve these contentions. Peace is, without question, a necessity.

Scholars such as Adegbami (2020:59) note that the specific terminology of "peacebuilding" entered the political and administrative lexicon around 1975, following Johan Galtung's pioneering work, *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding*. Since its

introduction, the concept has become a staple in global discourse, particularly as threats to global sustainability and order persist.

It is crucial to understand that peace is the precursor to peacebuilding. The former is indispensable to the latter; one cannot build upon a foundation that does not exist. Peace serves as the core; it is only when a state of peace exists that it can be fortified or built upon. Etymologically, "peace" originates from the Latin term *pax*, implying a pact, treaty, or agreement to cease hostilities between conflicting parties.

Definitions abound. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* characterizes peace as a state of "freedom from civil clamor and confusion" (Gove & Webster, 1993). It is synonymous with public tranquility. For peace to be genuine, the atmosphere must be devoid of chaos and uproar, allowing citizens to conduct their daily lives without obstruction. Howard (1987) expands this view, arguing that peace is not merely the absence of warfare but the preservation of a just and orderly society. He clarifies that "order" implies defense against violence and invasion, while a "just society" is one where citizens are shielded from exploitation by those in power.

Ibeanu (2006) frames peace as a series of activities designed to minimize conflict and accelerate development within societies and the international community. Consequently, peace is the bedrock of social, political, and economic advancement. Ahamefule (2013) offers a simpler perspective, defining peace as a condition devoid of war, annoyance, or anxiety—a state of calmness.

Conversely, peacebuilding has become a dominant subject among social scientists, politicians, and global observers. Brinkmann (2006) defines it as the transformation from a violent situation to one characterized by political and socio-economic equity, justice, fairness, and security within a pluralistic culture. He delineates two aspects: reducing violence and enhancing existing peaceful structures. Boutros-Ghali (1992) views it as the mechanism for rebuilding war-torn regions, identifying and supporting structures that solidify peace to prevent a relapse into conflict.

Doyle and Sambanis (1999) argue that peacebuilding relies on the prior achievement of a minimum standard of peace. In this view, peacekeeping is the foundation; if peacekeeping fails, peacebuilding cannot succeed. While peacebuilding may not totally eradicate conflict, it constructs an environment ripe for negotiation, reconciliation, and compromise, addressing issues before they devolve into violence. When peacemakers and peacekeepers collaborate, the complex task of peacebuilding becomes more manageable (Dawson, 2004).

Ultimately, peacebuilding involves identifying and supporting measures required to transform a society toward sustainable, peaceful relationships and governance structures (UN, 2005). It is an attempt to conquer the structural, relational, and cultural contradictions that spark conflict (Morris, 2013). Thus, the triad of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding remains indispensable for any human organization or nation, particularly in Africa where the need is acute.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR COMPREHENSIVE PEACE

There is no doubt that the communities and states comprising the Nigerian federation are in dire need of tranquility. Historically, Nigeria has struggled to achieve true national cohesion, integration, and consistent socio-economic or political development. The federation was essentially constructed

to "hold together" diverse ethnicities that were arbitrarily amalgamated under British imperialism, a forced union that has struggled to find peace (Kumaratunga, 2011).

The rationale for pursuing all-encompassing peace in Nigeria is multifaceted:

1. **Facilitation of Economic Progress:** A peaceful environment is the soil in which economic investments take root, fostering growth and business stability.
2. **Enhancement of Social Bonds:** Peacebuilding constructs bridges of trust between diverse groups, nurturing a sense of community.
3. **Mitigation of Violence:** Proactive peace efforts minimize the risk of conflict, ensuring the safety of the populace.
4. **Elevation of Human Welfare:** Stability guarantees better access to essentials like education, healthcare, and nutrition, thereby improving the overall quality of life.
5. **Attraction of Foreign Capital:** A stable nation signals predictability to the world, drawing in tourism and foreign direct investment.
6. **Fortification of Democracy:** Peace encourages civic engagement, which is vital for a thriving democratic culture and good governance.
7. **Conservation of Heritage:** Peacebuilding safeguards cultural diversity and heritage, promoting cross-cultural exchange.
8. **Promotion of Regional Stability:** Domestic peace contributes to the stability of the entire region, fostering international cooperation.
9. **Protection of Rights:** A peaceful society is better positioned to uphold human rights and ensure dignity for all.
10. **Enablement of Sustainability:** Peace allows for long-term planning regarding environmental protection and sustainable development for future generations.

By attaining this comprehensive peace, Nigeria can cultivate a prosperous environment. Additional specific reasons for Nigeria's urgent need for peacebuilding include:

- **National Integration:** Conflict acts as a disintegrating force, separating tribes and ethnicities. Peace is the glue of cohesion.
- **Uninterrupted Development:** War halts progress. To ensure continuous development in communities and the nation, conflict must be arrested.
- **Resistance to External Aggression:** A nation divided by internal war lacks the cohesion to resist external threats. Currently, Nigeria's internal fractures weaken its defensive posture.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Conflict leaves a legacy of hunger and backwardness (Dobbins, 2003). Peace is a prerequisite for food security and poverty reduction.
- **Preservation of Life:** Insurgencies and wars claim thousands of lives. Security is non-existent in conflict zones, leading to mass, unexpected fatalities.

- **Infrastructural Preservation:** War often leads to the ruthless vandalism of public assets. Peace preserves these amenities.
- **Holistic Growth:** Peacemaking and peacebuilding are drivers of growth across political, cultural, and economic sectors (Curtis & Dzinesa, 2012).
- **Environmental Conservation:** Peaceful coexistence prevents the environmental degradation often caused by the machinery of war (Adegbami, 2020:64).

If Nigeria hopes to compete with developed nations, it must prioritize a strategic and committed peacebuilding process. This requires empathy, effective communication, justice, tolerance, and a commitment to non-violent conflict resolution.

CRITICAL ISSUES THREATENING NIGERIAN STABILITY

Nigeria is a complex entity, characterized by a vast array of ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and a rapidly growing population with diverse backgrounds. Consequently, the reality of peaceful coexistence is constantly under interrogation. Drawing on Adegbami (2020:65) and Curtis (2012), several key factors threaten peace and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria:

1. Ethnic Multiplicity The multi-ethnic composition of the nation is a primary breeding ground for discord. Every year, hundreds of lives are lost in ethnic clashes. The pervasive fear among various ethnic groups of being politically marginalized generates significant tension, which frequently escalates into direct or indirect conflict (Abubakar, 2011).

2. Systemic Marginalization The oil-rich communities of the Niger Delta have historically faced economic marginalization and underdevelopment. This neglect has forced local populations to agitate for empowerment and control over the resources in their territory. As a result, the region is prone to inter- and intra-communal conflict. The paradox of enduring massive resource extraction while suffering a lack of social services has made conflict a recurring theme, as locals fight for their perceived rights (International Association for Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, 2007). The core drivers of this unrest are demands for enhanced revenue allocation, environmental protection, and social justice. This has spawned various militia groups, including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) (Opone, 2014:1).

3. Political Volatility and Elections The electoral process in Nigeria has rarely been peaceful. Election periods are often characterized by a spike in kidnappings, assassinations, and general violence. Furthermore, political dissatisfaction has fueled secessionist movements, particularly among those of Igbo extraction who desire a separate nation. Prominent groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) lead this struggle. These agitations have disrupted business and led to fatalities. Tensions escalated significantly following the sentencing of IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu to life imprisonment by the Federal High Court in Abuja on November 20, 2025.

4. Land Tenure Disputes Given the cultural and economic importance of land in Nigeria, ownership struggles are perpetual. Land conflict is a widespread phenomenon, fueling both intra-

ethnic and inter-ethnic violence. Core issues include disputes over ownership titles, boundary demarcations, and inheritance rights.

5. Territorial Invasion and Crop Destruction Disputes frequently erupt between neighboring towns, but a more specific threat involves land invasion. In the Middle Belt and Northern Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, there are recurrent instances of armed Fulani herdsmen invading farmlands. These incursions result in the destruction of crops and the killing of residents, leaving landowners feeling helpless and vulnerable (Abubakar, 2011).

6. Implementation of Sharia Law Religious intolerance remains a potent source of friction, particularly between Christianity and Islam. The formal adoption of the criminal aspects of the Sharia legal code in Northern Nigeria sparked significant conflict. The establishment of the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) by Northern leaders to promote Sharia nationwide was met with strong resistance from Christian groups in the South and Middle Belt, who viewed it as a covert agenda to Islamize the nation.

7. Religious Persecution The precedent set by Ahmed Sani Yerima, the former Governor of Zamfara State who first introduced Sharia code, was widely applauded by the local Muslim population but created deep national fissures. This move fostered mutual mistrust. A tragic example of religious intolerance occurred on May 12, 2022, when Deborah Samuel, a Christian woman, was murdered and burned by a mob in Sokoto State over allegations of blasphemy. Such incidents and the application of religious laws continue to erode lasting peace (Adegbami, 2020:65-66).

8. Youth Unemployment The youth demographic is the engine of national development, provided they are adequately prepared by parents and supported by the government. When the government fails to create an enabling environment for livelihoods, this demographic becomes volatile. Unemployment is a direct contributor to the rise in banditry, armed robbery, and theft.

9. Youth Restiveness Youths are frequently the primary actors in violent conflicts. Restiveness among this demographic has led to a surge in violence across the country. In the North, this manifests as Boko Haram insurgency; in the South, it appears as hostage-taking and oil bunkering. The nationwide #EndSARS protests in 2021 demonstrated the capacity of youths to disrupt the status quo. Despite these threats, it appears that peacebuilding stakeholders have yet to maximize their efforts.

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PEACE-BUILDING PROCESS

Stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups possessing a vested interest in the outcome of peacebuilding efforts, or those directly affected by conflict. These actors are pivotal in resolving disputes and ensuring sustainable tranquility. They are drawn from various sectors of society:

1. Political Actors: This category includes leaders of political parties, state functionaries (ministries, departments), legislative assemblies, and the judiciary. They hold the levers of policy and governance.

2. Military and Security Apparatus: Comprising the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, and paramilitary units, these actors are constitutionally mandated to protect lives, property, and territorial integrity against aggression.

3. Economic Entrepreneurs: Business moguls, multinational corporations, and traders constitute this group. Their commercial success relies heavily on stability; without peace, business cannot thrive.

4. Civil Society and NGOs: This sector covers a broad spectrum, including labor unions, community groups, faith-based organizations, charitable foundations, and professional associations. Their diverse reach makes them indispensable in grassroots peace efforts.

5. International and Regional Bodies: Organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, and ECOWAS play a critical role in mediating conflicts and promoting peace standards across borders.

6. The Media: This refers to the platforms of mass communication—print press, broadcasting (radio/TV), and digital media. They are responsible for reporting breakdowns in order and sensitizing the public on the necessity of peace.

7. Professional Guilds: Academics, bankers, engineers, journalists, and medical personnel can mobilize their professional networks to support peace initiatives and advocate for stability.

8. Religious Organizations: In Nigeria, the primary faiths are Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. Religious leaders influence vast congregations and can play a physical role in mediating conflicts or a spiritual role through prayers for peace (Adegbami, 2020:68-70).

9. Traditional Institutions: Custodians of culture—such as Emirs, Obas, Sultans, Ezes, and Obongs—are vital stakeholders. They should be actively involved in settling local disputes within their domains and maintaining a peaceful atmosphere.

10. Cultural Groups: These associations should function as agents of harmony, encouraging members to coexist peacefully despite tribal differences.

11. Educational and Social Institutions: Tertiary institutions gather staff and students from diverse backgrounds. These environments should serve as incubators for tolerance and training grounds for future peacemakers.

12. Sporting Bodies: Athletic endeavors, from local football clubs to international teams, offer a unique avenue for peacebuilding. By bringing together diverse individuals to play on the same team, sports foster relationships and acquaintances that can bridge ethnic and religious divides (Eloma & Eloma, 2014:15-20).

CONCLUSION

To achieve effective peacebuilding, it is imperative that all identified stakeholders converge to devise strategies for establishing and maintaining order in Nigeria. The complexity of the task requires that every actor be actively engaged in the process. Stakeholders across all levels and capacities must execute their roles with conscience and dedication. If these groups—ranging from government bodies to traditional rulers—perform their duties effectively, attaining relative peace across the varied communities and states of Nigeria will not only be possible but achievable.

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