

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria continues to experience diverse and persistent conflicts, including ethno-religious violence, farmer–herder disputes, separatist agitations, resource-based crises, urban criminality, and violent extremism. These conflicts have significantly undermined social cohesion, economic development, and political stability across different regions of the country. This paper adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary sources to examine the nature, causes, and dynamics of conflicts in Nigeria, as well as the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. Drawing on the perspectives of conflict transformation and human needs theory, the study analyses how structural inequalities, governance challenges, identity politics, and competition over scarce resources continue to fuel tensions and violence. It further evaluates both state-led and community-based peacebuilding mechanisms, including dialogue initiatives, traditional conflict resolution systems, security interventions, and international peacebuilding models applied in the Nigerian context. The findings reveal that while several initiatives have contributed to reducing tensions in some areas, many efforts remain fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently inclusive. The paper argues that sustainable peace in Nigeria requires a more integrated approach that prioritises inclusive governance, grassroots participation, institutional reforms, and socio-economic development. It therefore recommends strengthening community-based peacebuilding structures, promoting equitable resource management, and enhancing collaboration between government institutions, civil society organisations, and local communities to build long-term peace and stability.

Keywords: *Conflict, Violent Extremism, Peacebuilding, International Peacebuilding Models, Nigeria.*

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Background to the Study

Conflict is an unavoidable feature of human interaction and has remained a defining challenge in Nigeria since independence in 1960. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and culturally diverse society, the country has experienced varied forms of violent conflict, ranging from large-scale civil war to persistent localised disputes. These include the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), recurrent ethno-religious crises in Plateau and Kaduna States, militancy in the Niger Delta, farmer–herder conflicts across the Middle Belt, political violence, and the prolonged Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East (Akinwale 35). Collectively, these conflicts have resulted in loss of life, internal displacement, destruction of livelihoods and infrastructure, and the weakening of national unity and socio-economic stability.

In response, conflict resolution and peacebuilding have emerged as critical imperatives for Nigeria's survival and sustainable development. Conflict resolution involves processes such as negotiation, mediation, and institutional intervention aimed at managing or settling disputes, while peacebuilding focuses on addressing the structural and root causes of violence to prevent recurrence (Lederach 84). These processes are mutually reinforcing effective conflict resolution can halt immediate violence, whereas sustained peacebuilding tackles deeper political, social, and economic grievances that fuel long-term instability.

Nigeria's strategic importance as Africa's most populous country and one of its largest economies further underscores the urgency of addressing internal conflicts. Persistent instability has generated humanitarian crises and attracted regional and international concern due to its potential spill-over effects on neighbouring states and West African security (Ibeanu 12). Many conflicts are deeply rooted in structural factors such as poverty, inequality, political exclusion, weak governance, corruption, and competition over land and natural resources (Albert 51). Consequently, approaches that prioritise military responses, short-term ceasefires, or elite political settlements without addressing these underlying drivers have often produced fragile and short-lived peace.

This study therefore examines the nature, drivers, and patterns of conflict in Nigeria, evaluates state and non-state conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies, and identifies key implementation gaps. It recognises that while international peacebuilding models offer valuable insights, their effectiveness in Nigeria is constrained by local realities, including communal identities, informal power structures, and indigenous conflict management systems (Osaghae 17). Adopting a qualitative approach based on secondary sources, the paper aims to propose practical, context-sensitive policy recommendations to promote sustainable peace, social cohesion, and long-term national development.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Conflict Transformation Theory and Human Needs Theory as complementary frameworks for analysing conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Together, they offer an integrated perspective on both the structural and relational roots of conflict and the requirements for sustainable peace. Conflict Transformation Theory, advanced by John Paul Lederach, shifts attention from the mere cessation of violence to the

long-term transformation of relationships, institutions, and socio-political structures that sustain conflict (Lederach 20). The theory emphasises inclusive dialogue, trust-building, and institutional reform rather than elite-driven negotiations or coercive security responses. This approach is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where recurrent ethno-religious and communal conflicts persist due to historical grievances, weak governance, and deep mistrust between communities and the state. Evidence from Plateau State and the Niger Delta suggests that military interventions often produce temporary stability, whereas community-based dialogue and peace initiatives have been more effective in addressing relational and institutional deficits.

Human Needs Theory, articulated by John Burton, explains protracted conflicts as resulting from the systematic denial of fundamental human needs such as security, identity, recognition, participation, and economic well-being (Burton 34). From this perspective, coercive measures cannot achieve lasting peace unless these needs are addressed. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency, separatist agitations in the South-East, and resource-based conflicts in the Niger Delta reflect unmet needs linked to poverty, political exclusion, and perceived injustice. The persistence of these conflicts highlights the limitations of force-based responses that neglect underlying socio-economic and political grievances. This study argues that sustainable peace in Nigeria depends on transforming exclusionary structures while simultaneously addressing fundamental human needs. This combined framework is well suited to Nigeria's complex conflict environment and supports peacebuilding strategies that are inclusive, context-sensitive, and oriented towards long-term structural change.

Conceptual Literature

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution and peacebuilding are closely related but distinct concepts in peace and security studies. Conflict resolution refers to processes such as negotiation, mediation, and dialogue aimed at managing or ending overt conflict, while peacebuilding focuses on long-term efforts to address the structural and relational causes of violence (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 21). Burton emphasises that durable conflict resolution requires addressing underlying human needs such as security, identity, and recognition, as agreements that ignore these needs are unlikely to endure (Burton 36).

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding adopts a broader and longer-term orientation, seeking to establish the social, political, and economic conditions necessary for sustainable peace. Building on Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace, peacebuilding aims not only to end direct violence but also to promote justice, inclusion, and social harmony (Galtung 9). Lederach further conceptualises peacebuilding as a comprehensive process involving actors at all levels of society in transforming relationships and institutions that sustain conflict (Lederach 20).

Conflict Forms and their Implications for Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Empirical scholarship shows that conflict in Nigeria is multi-dimensional, spatially uneven,

and deeply embedded in political, socio-economic, and identity-based structures. These diverse forms of conflict have had profound and differentiated effects on peacebuilding efforts, often constraining their sustainability and effectiveness.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Peacebuilding Constraints

Ethno-religious conflicts remain among the most persistent and destabilising forms of violence in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau, Kaduna, Bauchi, Benue, and parts of Nasarawa States. Empirical scholarship links these conflicts to the politicisation of ethnic and religious identities, the institutionalisation of the indigene, settler divide, and competition over political power, land, and state resources (Albert 51; Best 22; Osaghae 17). In urban centres such as Jos, Kaduna, and Tafawa Balewa, identity markers are frequently mobilised for political purposes, transforming routine disputes into recurrent and violent confrontations.

Evidence from Plateau and Kaduna States shows that peacebuilding strategies dominated by military deployments, curfews, and elite-driven dialogue have produced only short-term stability. Studies of the Jos crises reveal that repeated security interventions failed to address exclusionary citizenship regimes, unequal land tenure, and discriminatory access to political office, allowing conflict to recur (Best 72–76). Ethno-religious conflicts further undermine peacebuilding by eroding inter-communal trust and normalising social and spatial segregation, particularly in Jos and Kaduna (Mustapha 12). These dynamics disproportionately affect women and youth—who bear the brunt of displacement and economic disruption yet remain marginalised in formal peace processes, thereby weakening the inclusiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding outcomes (Eze et al. 224). Literature underscores the need to move beyond security-dominated responses towards inclusive, community-based approaches that address structural inequalities, citizenship rights, and locally legitimate conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Insurgency and Violent Extremism

The Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria constitutes one of the country's most protracted and complex security and peacebuilding challenges. Empirical studies trace its origins to structural socio-economic deprivation, chronic youth unemployment, weak governance, and long-standing political exclusion in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States (Onuoha 58–60; Ibeanu 12–14). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses show that limited state presence, evident in poor service delivery, corruption, and restricted access to education and livelihoods, created conditions conducive to radical mobilisation, particularly among marginalised youth (Agbiboa 9–11; Maiangwa et al. 202–204).

While counter-insurgency operations have reduced Boko Haram's territorial control, evidence suggests mixed peacebuilding outcomes. Field-based studies indicate that heavy-handed security measures, including mass arrests, civilian casualties, and prolonged states of emergency, eroded trust between communities and security agencies, thereby undermining intelligence-sharing and community cooperation essential for sustainable peace (Agbiboa 15–17). The insurgency has also devastated social and institutional infrastructure; schools,

health facilities, markets, and religious centres, leading to widespread displacement and long-term social dislocation (Zenn 41–43; UNDP 27–29). The displacement of over two million people has strained host communities and weakened traditional governance and dispute-resolution mechanisms, complicating reconciliation and reintegration efforts (Ikelegbe 96–98; UNHCR 18–20).

Deradicalisation and reintegration initiatives, such as Operation Safe Corridor, illustrate both progress and limitations in Nigeria's peacebuilding response. Empirical assessments show modest success in disengagement from violence, but effectiveness is constrained by inadequate community sensitisation, limited livelihood opportunities, and persistent stigma against former combatants (Maiangwa and Uzodike 112–114). Gendered impacts further complicate peacebuilding, as women and girls subjected to abduction, forced marriage, and sexual violence remain largely excluded from formal peace processes (Oriola 233–235). Literature indicates that sustainable peace in North-East Nigeria requires a shift from predominantly military responses towards integrated strategies that combine security with inclusive governance, economic recovery, psychosocial support, and community-driven reconciliation mechanisms.

Resource-Based Conflicts in the Niger Delta

Resource-based conflicts in the Niger Delta remain one of Nigeria's most enduring peacebuilding challenges, rooted in the political economy of oil extraction, environmental degradation, and systemic socio-economic exclusion. Empirical studies show that despite the region's centrality to national revenue, host communities suffer severe environmental damage, loss of livelihoods, and marginalisation from decision-making processes (Watts 52–54; Ikelegbe 89–91). Oil spills, gas flaring, and land degradation have undermined fishing and farming, intensifying grievances against the state and multinational oil companies. These structural injustices contributed to the rise of militant groups in the early 2000s, as unemployed and marginalised youth mobilised around demands for resource control, recognition, and economic inclusion (Ikelegbe 93–95; Watts 61–63).

Peacebuilding interventions, particularly the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme, achieved short-term security gains by reducing armed violence and stabilising oil production (Aghedo 188–190). However, empirical evidence shows that these gains were fragile because the programme prioritised disarmament and individual benefits for ex-militants while neglecting community development, environmental remediation, and inclusive governance reforms (Ikelegbe 101–103; Obi 47–49). Continued environmental pollution, slow clean-up efforts in areas such as Ogoniland, and weak, unaccountable development institutions have further undermined trust in state-led peace efforts (UNEP 14–16; Akinwale 58–60). Overall, the literature indicates that sustainable peacebuilding in the Niger Delta requires a shift from security-focused and compensatory approaches toward inclusive development strategies centred on environmental justice, community participation, transparent resource governance, and institutional accountability.

Farmer–Herder Conflicts and Communal Insecurity

Farmer–herder conflicts have become one of the most widespread and deadly forms of communal violence in Nigeria, particularly across the Middle Belt states of Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, and parts of Kaduna. Empirical studies attribute the escalation of these conflicts to the interaction of environmental stress, population pressure, and weak land governance. Climate change, induced desertification and shrinking pasture in northern Nigeria have intensified the southward migration of pastoralists, increasing competition over land and water with farming communities (Tonah 156–158; Okoli and Atelhe 85–87). The expansion of cultivated land and the erosion of traditional grazing routes have further heightened tensions, while ambiguous land tenure arrangements and inconsistent enforcement of land-use regulations have undermined local dispute-management mechanisms (Abbass 63–65).

Peacebuilding responses have largely prioritised military deployment and policing, producing only temporary reductions in violence without addressing underlying governance and livelihood challenges. Empirical evidence from Plateau, Benue, and Taraba States shows that unresolved land tenure disputes, weak compensation mechanisms, and declining local mediation institutions continue to fuel recurrent violence (Tonah 161–163; Blench 12–14). These conflicts also disrupt agricultural production, exacerbate food insecurity, and displace rural populations, thereby weakening the socio-economic foundations of peace (International Crisis Group 6–8). Women and children are disproportionately affected yet remain marginalised in peace processes, limiting their inclusiveness and sustainability (Eze et al. 221–223). There is the need to move beyond militarised responses towards integrated peacebuilding strategies centred on land governance reform, climate adaptation, inclusive local mediation, and livelihood support for both farmers and pastoralists.

Political and Electoral Violence

Political and electoral violence remains a persistent feature of Nigeria's democratic process, significantly undermining peacebuilding and democratic consolidation. Empirical studies link this violence to intense political competition, the high material value attached to political office, weak electoral governance, and the mobilisation of identity and unemployed youth by political elites (Omotola 49–51; Adetula 18–20). Analyses of the 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2019 general elections reveal recurring patterns of voter intimidation, ballot snatching, arson, assassinations, and clashes between party supporters, reflecting the zero-sum nature of electoral contests in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch 12–15; Bekoe 27–29). The use of youth as political thugs further reinforces cycles of violence and highlights broader socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak post-election reintegration mechanisms (Omotola 54–56).

Weak institutional capacity exacerbates electoral violence and undermines peacebuilding. Empirical research shows that despite reforms, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) continues to face logistical, security, and enforcement challenges, particularly at sub-national levels, while inconsistent prosecution of offenders sustains a culture of impunity (Adetula 22–24). Repeated exposure to electoral violence erodes public

trust in democratic institutions, discourages voter participation, and deepens political alienation, especially among women and young people (Bratton 98–100). Although post-election peace initiatives such as peace accords and elite mediation reduce immediate tensions, their long-term impact remains limited due to weak grassroots ownership and the absence of sustained civic education and institutional reform (Bekoe 31–33; Kukah 64–66). Overall, the literature underscores the need for comprehensive electoral reform, effective law enforcement, youth economic empowerment, and inclusive political processes to reduce incentives for violence and strengthen sustainable peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Assessment of Peacebuilding Strategies in Nigeria

Empirical studies indicate that peacebuilding in Nigeria involves security measures, institutional reforms, livelihood programmes, and community-based initiatives implemented by state and non-state actors (Albert 46). While some have achieved short-term stability, long-term peace remains uneven due to structural inequalities, political constraints, and weak implementation (Akinwale 53; Burton 89).

Security-Oriented Peacebuilding Strategies

Security-based peacebuilding has been a dominant response to conflict in Nigeria, with the deployment of military and paramilitary forces producing short-term security gains in regions such as the North-East and the Middle Belt. Empirical studies show that counter-insurgency operations weakened Boko Haram's territorial control and temporarily reduced large-scale attacks, while security deployments in farmer–herder conflict zones curtailed overt violence (Onuoha 214; Agbiboa 67). However, these gains have largely remained fragile, as militarisation often alienates local communities through allegations of abuses and civilian harm, thereby eroding trust and cooperation with the state (Agbiboa 71).

The literature further demonstrates that security-first approaches are insufficient for sustainable peacebuilding when implemented in isolation. Heavy-handed interventions tend to obscure deeper governance failures, generate new grievances, and reinforce social polarisation, particularly among marginalised youth (Okoli and Atelhe 104; Ibeanu 58). Empirical evidence suggests that security strategies are more effective when integrated with governance reforms, justice mechanisms, and community-based initiatives that address root causes of conflict and rebuild social relationships (Albert 92; Best 133).

Negotiation as a Peacebuilding Strategy in Nigeria

Negotiation has emerged as an informal peacebuilding response to banditry in north-western Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States. Empirical studies show that state officials and local intermediaries have engaged bandit groups, often through ransom payments, to secure the release of abductees, yielding short-term humanitarian relief and temporary reductions in attacks (International Crisis Group; SBM Intelligence). These negotiations function largely as emergency conflict-management measures, driven by weak state capacity and urgent humanitarian pressures rather than a structured peace-building strategy. Payments strengthen bandit groups, incentivise kidnapping, and erode state

authority, thereby deepening cycles of violence (Amnesty International; International Crisis Group). Without accountability, disarmament, and governance reforms, negotiation fails to address root causes of insecurity and remains incompatible with long-term peacebuilding objectives.

Political and Institutional Peacebuilding Approaches

Studies on electoral reform, decentralisation, and formal peace institutions show uneven outcomes: while reforms have helped manage violence in specific contexts, their broader peacebuilding impact remains limited by elite dominance and institutional weaknesses (Omotola 78–80; Adetula 112–114). Research on electoral and decentralisation reforms indicates modest gains alongside persistent structural problems. Improvements in electoral administration and monitoring have reduced overt election-day violence in some cycles, particularly after 2011, but have not addressed deeper drivers such as godfatherism and winner-takes-all politics (Omotola 83–85). Similarly, decentralisation has eased communal tensions where local governments are autonomous and transparent, yet state interference and caretaker arrangements have undermined accountability and citizen trust in many states (Aiyede 56–58; Albert 91–93).

Studies of peace committees and conflict-management institutions show short-term success in de-escalation but limited long-term impact due to weak resources, lack of enforcement powers, and elite capture (Best 104–106; Ibeanu 67–69). The literature concludes that political and institutional reforms are necessary but insufficient: without inclusiveness, accountability, and genuine political will, reforms stabilise conflicts temporarily while leaving underlying grievances unresolved (Gaventa 42–44; Fox 118–120).

Economic and Livelihood-Based Peacebuilding Strategies

Economic and livelihood-based interventions are widely regarded as a core pillar of peacebuilding in Nigeria, based on the assumption that poverty, unemployment, and economic exclusion increase vulnerability to violent conflict. Empirical studies support the relevance of economic factors but emphasise that livelihood programmes alone cannot guarantee sustainable peace. While such interventions often contribute to short-term stabilisation by reducing immediate incentives for violence, their long-term impact depends on inclusive design, effective targeting, and integration with broader governance and accountability reforms (Ikelegbe 92–95; Aiyede 61–63).

Evidence from youth employment schemes and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration initiatives, particularly in the Niger Delta shows that livelihood support reduced militancy and restored economic activity in the short term (Ikelegbe 101–103; Agbiboa 74–76). However, longitudinal assessments reveal persistent limitations, including elite capture, exclusion of non-violent youth and communities, and the concentration of beneficiaries in insecure, low-income livelihoods. These shortcomings weakened community legitimacy and failed to address deeper structural drivers of conflict such as environmental degradation, land dispossession, and unequal resource distribution (Watts 138–141; Obi 59–61).

Studies from the North-East and Middle Belt further demonstrate that livelihood interventions produce fragile peace outcomes when implemented in isolation from land reform, agricultural development, and effective local governance. Poor targeting, politicisation, and uneven distribution of benefits have, in some cases, intensified local grievances and social tensions (Albert 102–104). Overall, the literature concludes that economic peacebuilding in Nigeria is most effective when embedded within inclusive development strategies, environmental justice, and accountable institutions; without these conditions, livelihood programmes tend to stabilise conflict temporarily without resolving its root causes (Ikelegbe 118–120).

Community-Based and Grassroots Peacebuilding Initiatives

A growing body of empirical literature demonstrates that community-based and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives play a critical role in mitigating conflict and sustaining peace across Nigeria, particularly in contexts where state-led interventions are weak, slow, or distrusted. These approaches emphasise local ownership, cultural legitimacy, and participatory problem-solving, which enhance their acceptance and effectiveness at the community level. Empirical studies on traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms show that indigenous institutions, such as councils of elders, chiefs, and age-grade systems, have successfully mediated communal, land, and boundary disputes, especially in rural areas (Albert 112–115). Comparative analyses of conflicts in the South-West and Middle Belt indicate that these locally rooted mechanisms are often faster, less adversarial, and more trusted than formal judicial processes, enabling timely de-escalation of tensions (Albert 118–120). Similarly, research on Plateau State demonstrates that community-led dialogue forums helped restore communication between divided groups and reinforced shared norms of coexistence, thereby reducing cycles of retaliatory violence (Best 76–79).

Empirical research further highlights the preventive value of local peace committees and community mediation structures. Evidence from Kaduna, Plateau, and parts of the Niger Delta shows that peace committees comprising traditional authorities, women, youth representatives, and religious leaders have been effective in identifying early warning signs and managing disputes before they escalate into large-scale violence (Albert 131–134). These bodies promote inclusive dialogue, build trust across communal divides, and reduce the politicisation of local grievances. Faith-based and interfaith initiatives also feature prominently in literature. Studies document how Christian–Muslim dialogue platforms in Jos and Kaduna reduced tensions and facilitated reconciliation by leveraging moral authority and shared ethical values that resonate deeply within communities (Best 83–86). In post-conflict settings, grassroots initiatives such as women-led reconciliation groups, youth peace clubs, and community-based trauma-healing programmes have contributed significantly to rebuilding trust, restoring everyday social relations, and addressing the psychosocial dimensions of violence (Albert 142–145).

Despite their strengths, empirical studies consistently identify structural and institutional constraints that limit the sustainability and scalability of community-based peacebuilding in

Nigeria. Many grassroots initiatives operate with limited funding, depend heavily on voluntary labour, and lack technical and organisational capacity, which constrains their long-term effectiveness (Best 91–93). Poor integration between local peace structures and formal state institutions often results in fragmented responses to conflict and weak policy influence, while the absence of formal recognition can expose community mediators to political pressure or undermine the enforceability of locally negotiated agreements (Albert 149–151). Moreover, some traditional mechanisms reproduce exclusionary power relations by marginalising women, youth, and minority groups, thereby weakening their long-term peacebuilding potential (Albert 153–155). Community-based peacebuilding initiatives are most effective when locally grounded, inclusive, and institutionally supported, serving as an essential complement to broader governance and development reforms by addressing the relational and cultural dimensions of conflict often overlooked by top-down approaches (Best 97–99).

Role of Civil Society and International Actors

Empirical literature consistently underscores the pivotal role of civil society organisations (CSOs) and international development actors in advancing peacebuilding in Nigeria, particularly in contexts of weak state capacity and low public trust in government institutions. Civil society actors, including NGOs, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and community networks, have been central to peace education, civic engagement, mediation, and early warning initiatives across conflict-affected regions. Studies show that CSO-led peace education and voter sensitisation programmes have contributed to attitudinal change, reduced tolerance for violence, and weakened elite manipulation of ethnic and religious identities, especially among youth (Suberu 201–204; Aiyede 88–91). By promoting non-violent political participation and inter-group understanding, these initiatives have helped mitigate communal and electoral tensions in parts of South-West and North-Central Nigeria.

The literature also highlights the critical role of CSOs in dialogue facilitation, mediation, and psychosocial recovery. Empirical evidence from Plateau, Kaduna, and Benue States indicates that NGOs and faith-based organisations often serve as neutral conveners capable of bringing together actors who distrust state authorities, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and durability of peace processes (Albert 146–149). Their relative autonomy enables more inclusive engagement of women, youth, and marginalised groups. In post-conflict settings, particularly in the North-East, NGO-led trauma counselling, community healing workshops, and reintegration support for internally displaced persons have contributed to social recovery and reduced cycles of revenge by addressing the psychological dimensions of violence often neglected in state-led interventions (Aiyede 97–99).

International development partners have complemented these efforts by providing funding, technical expertise, and institutional support, with evidence suggesting that donor-backed programmes are most effective when they prioritise local ownership and work through indigenous civil society structures (Suberu 210–212). However, empirical studies also

document limitations, including weak contextual adaptation, short funding cycles, and coordination challenges that fragment interventions and undermine sustainability (Albert 153–155; Aiyede 102–104). Overall, the literature concludes that civil society and international actors contribute most effectively to peacebuilding when interventions are inclusive, locally grounded, and coordinated with state and community institutions. Externally driven or technocratic approaches, by contrast, tend to yield short-term and fragile outcomes, reinforcing the need for long-term, participatory, and context-sensitive peacebuilding strategies in Nigeria.

Table 1: Major forms of conflict in Nigeria and their implications for peacebuilding

Form of Conflict	Primary Drivers (Empirical Evidence)	Manifestations of Violence	Peacebuilding Interventions Applied	Implications for Peacebuilding Outcomes
Farmer–Herder Conflicts	Climate change–induced resource scarcity, population pressure, weak land tenure systems, collapse of traditional mediation mechanisms (Tonah; Okoli & Atelhe)	Communal clashes, village raids, killings, displacement, destruction of farms and cattle	Military deployments, grazing bans, peace committees, ad hoc dialogues	Security-centric responses fail to address land governance and livelihoods, leading to cyclical violence and fragile peace at community level
Resource-Based Conflicts (Niger Delta)	Environmental degradation, oil revenue exclusion, elite capture, state–corporate alliances (Watts; Ikelegbe)	Militancy, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, armed resistance	Amnesty Programme, DDR initiatives, development agencies	Temporary reduction in violence but weak sustainability due to unresolved structural grievances and limited community participation
Political and Electoral Violence	Intense elite competition, weak electoral institutions, youth mobilisation by political actors, impunity (Omotola; Adetula)	Pre- and post-election clashes, intimidation, assassinations, riots	Election security operations, post-election peace accords	Undermines democratic legitimacy and trust; reactive interventions limit long-term political peacebuilding
Insurgency (Northeast)	Poverty, state fragility, ideological radicalisation, governance failure (Onuoha; Maiangwa)	Terrorism, mass abductions, destruction of infrastructure, humanitarian crises	Military counter-insurgency, deradicalisation programmes, humanitarian assistance	Militarised peacebuilding marginalises social reconstruction, delaying reconciliation and post-conflict recovery
Communal and Ethno-Religious Conflicts	Identity politicisation, historical grievances, weak local governance, elite manipulation (Best; Suberu)	Sectarian clashes, mob violence, displacement	Interfaith dialogues, commissions of inquiry, security deployments	Short-term stability without justice and reconciliation perpetuates mistrust and latent conflict
Urban Gang and Youth Violence	Unemployment, political patronage, urban poverty, weak policing (Alemika; Higazi)	Cultism, armed robbery, election-related violence	Policing operations, youth empowerment programmes	Inconsistent implementation and politicisation reduce effectiveness and sustainability

Source: Author, 2026

Table 1 highlights the major forms of conflict in Nigeria and shows that peacebuilding outcomes are strongly shaped by the nature of conflict drivers and the type of interventions applied. Across conflict types—farmer–herder clashes, Niger Delta militancy, electoral violence, insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, and urban youth violence—empirical evidence indicates a heavy reliance on security-oriented and ad hoc responses.

While these interventions often reduce violence temporarily, they rarely address underlying structural issues such as weak governance, economic exclusion, land tenure problems, identity politicisation, and institutional fragility. As a result, peacebuilding outcomes remain fragile, with recurring cycles of violence and limited social reconciliation. The table therefore reinforces the empirical conclusion that sustainable peacebuilding in Nigeria requires context-specific, inclusive strategies that combine security measures with governance reform, livelihood support, and grassroots participation.

Implications of Conflict Dynamics for National Development in Nigeria

Evidence from Nigeria and comparative conflict-affected contexts shows that persistent conflict has profound and long-term implications for national development, shaped less by the existence of violence than by how conflicts are managed and resolved (Aiyede 61–63; Albert 140–142). In Nigeria, recurrent conflict has weakened core state institutions, undermining bureaucratic efficiency, judicial authority, and local governance capacity, particularly in the North-East and Niger Delta (Ikelegbe 97–100; Suberu 188–190). Insurgency and communal violence have disrupted education, healthcare delivery, and local administration, contributing to poor human development outcomes and reinforcing a cycle in which institutional fragility and underdevelopment fuel renewed conflict (Onuoha 44–46; Maiangwa et al. 118–120).

Conflict dynamics further constrain development through the diversion of public resources to security spending and the erosion of economic productivity and social cohesion. Empirical studies show that rising defence and internal security budgets crowd out investment in infrastructure, education, and social welfare, while insecurity in regions such as the Niger Delta discourages private investment and industrial diversification despite high resource endowments (Aiyede 66–68; Watts 53–55; Ikelegbe 104–106). Similarly, farmer–herder conflicts and electoral violence disrupt agricultural production, deepen food insecurity, weaken democratic participation, and exacerbate regional inequalities, making inclusive development planning difficult (Tonah 34–36; Okoli and Atelhe 82–84; Omotola 156–158; Adetula 91–93).

Comparative experiences reinforce these findings. Evidence from Rwanda and Sierra Leone shows that peacebuilding approaches combining security stabilisation with justice, inclusive governance, and community participation support institutional recovery and sustainable development, whereas militarised strategies that neglect governance reforms—such as in Afghanistan—produce fragile gains that quickly unravel (Galtung 23–25; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 219–221; Burton 74–76). The Nigerian case reflects these global

lessons: security-centred or elite-driven peacebuilding may yield temporary stability, but durable national development requires integrated strategies that address structural inequalities, strengthen institutions, and embed peacebuilding within inclusive development frameworks (Albert 145–147; Aiyede 70–72; Gaventa and Barrett 12–14).

Conclusion

Nigeria's peacebuilding challenge extends beyond controlling violence to transforming the structural and social conditions that sustain conflict. The literature shows that security-focused and elite-driven interventions alone cannot produce durable peace; instead, sustainable peacebuilding requires addressing political exclusion, unequal resource access, weak institutions, and deficits in justice and accountability (Lederach 25; Burton 40).

Empirical evidence from ethno-religious conflicts, the North-East insurgency, and resource-based violence in the Niger Delta demonstrates that peace initiatives remain fragile where communities are excluded and grievances over identity, livelihoods, and dignity persist (Best 14; Albert 102). This underscores the importance of legitimacy, trust, and local ownership, and highlights the limits of militarised, state-centric approaches that neglect reconciliation and inclusive governance. Effective peacebuilding in Nigeria must be context-specific, participatory, and long term. Strategies that integrate conflict transformation, human needs satisfaction, grassroots participation, and accountable institutions are more likely to move the country beyond reactive crisis management towards a resilient peace architecture that supports national unity, democratic stability, and sustainable development.

Recommendations

To address Nigeria's persistent conflicts, the government must prioritise inclusive governance that addresses marginalisation, distributive injustice, and inequitable access to resources, the following recommendations are proposed to support sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria:

- 1. *Strengthening theoretical and conceptual foundations of peacebuilding***

There is a need for clearer integration of conflict resolution and peacebuilding theories into policy and practice. Government agencies, academic institutions, and peace practitioners should adopt context-sensitive frameworks that reflect Nigeria's historical, socio-economic, and cultural realities. This will improve understanding of conflict dynamics and enhance the design of effective peacebuilding strategies.

- 2. *Addressing major forms of conflict and their peacebuilding implications***

Given the diversity of conflicts in Nigeria—ranging from ethno-religious and farmer–herder conflicts to insurgency and communal violence—peace interventions must be conflict-specific rather than uniform. Tailored approaches that recognise local drivers, actors, and grievances should be prioritised, particularly at state and community levels.

- 3. *Improving conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives***

Existing conflict resolution mechanisms should be strengthened through better coordination, funding, and capacity building. Peacebuilding efforts should combine

state-led initiatives with the contributions of civil society organisations, traditional institutions, religious leaders, women, and youth groups. Inclusive dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation processes should be institutionalised as core elements of peacebuilding.

4. *Mitigating the impact of conflict dynamics on national development*

To reduce the negative effects of conflict on national development, Nigeria must address governance failures, social exclusion, and economic inequality. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency, and ensuring equitable access to resources will help reduce grievances that undermine development and fuel instability.

5. *Promoting practical pathways to sustainable peace*

Sustainable peace requires a preventive and development-oriented approach. This includes establishing effective early warning and response systems, investing in youth employment and skills development, improving land and resource governance, and integrating peacebuilding into national development planning. By linking peacebuilding with social justice, inclusive governance, and economic empowerment, Nigeria can move from reactive conflict management to long-term conflict transformation.

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