JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 4, No. 1 / March, 2026
https://www.jopd.com.ng

LOCAL-LEVEL PEACEBUILDING IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES: A STUDY OF EBIRALAND, NIGERIA

MUHAMMAD IDRIS JAPA
Department of Peace Studies & Conflict Resolution
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja
08035057544, 08055561060
idrisjapa007@gmail.com

BASIL O. IBEBUNJO, PhD
Department of Peace Studies & Conflict Resolution
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja

CHARLES OMOTOLAOLUSANYA, PhD
Department of Peace Studies & Conflict Resolution
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja

Abstract
This study critically examines post-violent conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Ebiraland, a region historically affected by intra-communal violence and socio-political tensions in Nigeria. Grounded in a multidisciplinary framework that integrates peace and conflict studies, political sociology, and indigenous governance systems, the study investigates the root causes of conflict, the mechanisms employed in addressing hostilities, and the sustainability of post-conflict peace initiatives. Employing qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study evaluates the roles of traditional institutions, government agencies, civil society organizations, and grassroots actors in promoting reconciliation and stability. Findings indicate that, although significant progress has been made in fostering peace and social cohesion, persistent structural challenges, such as youth unemployment, political marginalization, and weak institutional trust, continue to undermine long-term stability. The study concludes by proposing policy recommendations that emphasize inclusive governance, the strengthening of conflict resolution frameworks, and enhanced community participation in peacebuilding processes.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, Ebiraland, Peacebuilding, Post-conflict reconstruction, Socio-political tension

Introduction

Post-conflict societies are communities that have recently experienced armed conflict, civil war, or large-scale political violence and continue to grapple with its aftermath. This period does not necessarily signify the complete cessation of violence but reflects a shift from organized large-scale hostilities to stabilization and reconstruction efforts (MacGinty & Richmond, 2020). According to the UNDP (2008), post-conflict recovery involves restoring national institutions and infrastructure, promoting social and economic reintegration, and fostering reconciliation among affected groups. Nigeria has experienced recurring conflicts rooted in ethnic, religious, political, and resource-based tensions. From the civil war to ongoing insurgencies in the North-East, farmer-herder clashes, and ethno-religious violence in the Middle Belt, these crises necessitate both immediate conflict resolution and sustained peacebuilding strategies to prevent relapse into violence and enhance social cohesion.

Ebiraland, historically, has been marked by both resilience and conflict. The Ebira people are remembered as frontline warriors of the ancient Kwararafa Kingdom (Abdulsalam, 2004), and their resistance to external threats, including Jihadist incursions, asserted political independence and cultural integrity prior to integration into Nigeria (Okene, 2008). Historically, conflicts in Ebiraland were primarily defensive, aimed at collective security rather than fratricidal violence, and can be categorized as political, clannish, cultural, religious, and gangsterism-related.

The introduction of party politics in the 1940s and 1950s generated intense rivalries between groups such as the Igbira Tribal Union (ITU) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which persisted through the Second and Third Republics, manifesting in violence, thuggery, and property destruction. Pre-colonial and early republican clan cooperation, including intermarriage, cultural festivals, and collective defense, was disrupted as politicians increasingly exploited clans for political gain, fostering mistrust among formerly cohesive communities. Although religious violence has declined since the 1980s, gang-related activities driven by youth unemployment have emerged as a new source of insecurity, exacerbated by technological advances and mass communication platforms (Japa, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria's pluralistic society, ethnic and religious fragmentation often drives conflict and insecurity (Alenika, 2012). However, Ebiraland is unique in its relative homogeneity; the Ebira share common descent, language, culture, ancestry, and intermarriage patterns (Suleiman, 2006). Despite these unifying factors, political rivalries, particularly during the 1999–2007 period, fractured the community, resulting in violent clashes between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Action Congress (AC) that left several people dead, injured, and property destroyed, undermining centuries of social cohesion and infrastructural development (Okene, 2008).

This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to knowledge by critically examining peacebuilding efforts as a response to post-violent conflicts in Ebiraland, with the aim of understanding the mechanisms, challenges, and sustainability of local post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

Research Questions

To guide the focus and outcomes of this study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the underlying causes and historical trajectory of violent conflicts in Ebiraland?
2. What are the social, economic, and political effects of these violent conflicts on the community?
3. What strategies and interventions have been implemented to prevent the recurrence of violent conflicts?

Research Objectives

Accordingly, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To critically examine the root causes and historical progression of violent conflicts in Ebiraland.
2. To assess the multidimensional impacts of these conflicts on the community.
3. To identify and evaluate the measures and strategies instituted to mitigate future conflict and enhance post-conflict peacebuilding.

Literature Review

The literature review critically synthesizes relevant conceptual, theoretical, and empirical studies to situate the study and identify gaps.

Conceptual Clarifications

Post-conflict societies are communities that have experienced sustained violent conflict and are undergoing processes of transition from organised hostilities toward relative stability, recovery, and peace. This transition does not necessarily imply the complete absence of violence; rather, it reflects a shift from large-scale armed confrontation to efforts aimed at reconstruction, reconciliation, and institutional reform (MacGinty & Richmond, 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2008) conceptualises post-conflict recovery as a multidimensional process involving the restoration of state institutions and infrastructure, the reintegration of displaced populations, economic revitalisation, and the rebuilding of social trust among previously antagonistic groups.

Nigeria presents a complex post-conflict landscape shaped by ethnic pluralism, religious diversity, political competition, and struggles over resources. From the Nigerian Civil War to more recent insurgencies in the North-East, farmer–herder conflicts, and communal violence in the Middle Belt, the Nigerian state continues to grapple with cycles of violence and fragile peace. These experiences underscore the limits of short-term conflict management approaches and highlight the necessity of sustainable, locally grounded peacebuilding strategies (de Coning, 2020).

Within this broader national context, Ebiraland in present-day Kogi State offers a compelling case for examining local-level peacebuilding in a post-conflict society. Despite its relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity, Ebiraland has witnessed recurrent episodes of violent conflict linked to political rivalry, clannish divisions, youth mobilisation, and contestations over traditional authority. Historically, the Ebira people were renowned for collective defence and social cohesion, tracing their resilience to their role within the ancient Kwararafa Kingdom (Abdulsalam, 2004). Pre-colonial conflicts were largely defensive and externally oriented, rather than fratricidal. However, the advent of party politics in the mid-twentieth century, particularly from the 1940s onward, fundamentally altered inter-group relations, introducing intense political competition that fractured long-standing communal bonds (Okene, 2008).

The politicisation of clan identities during the First, Second, and Third Republics generated violent rivalries between political formations such as the Igbira Tribal Union (ITU), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and later political parties in the Fourth Republic. These rivalries eroded traditional mechanisms of cooperation, including intermarriage, communal festivals, and collective security arrangements. Although large-scale religious violence declined after the 1980s, new forms of insecurity emerged, particularly gang-related violence driven by youth unemployment, political patronage, and the proliferation of small arms, increasingly facilitated by modern communication technologies (Japa, 2011).

Post-Conflict Societies: Challenges and Analytical Perspectives

Post-conflict societies are commonly characterised by extensive infrastructural destruction, population displacement, psychological trauma, economic dislocation, and weakened institutions (Collier et al., 2003). While these characteristics are widely acknowledged in the literature, scholars increasingly argue that such descriptive accounts are insufficient unless situated within broader analytical frameworks that interrogate the structural and political conditions sustaining post-conflict fragility. Bloomfield, Barnes, and Huyse (2003)

emphasise that post-conflict reconstruction is not merely a technical exercise but a deeply political process shaped by power relations, social inequalities, and historical grievances.

Infrastructural devastation in post-conflict settings often reflects long-standing patterns of uneven development rather than the immediate effects of violence alone. Similarly, displacement and refugee crises are frequently exacerbated by weak governance structures and limited state capacity to provide protection and basic services (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020). The psychological impacts of conflict, including trauma and social mistrust, further complicate recovery efforts, particularly where formal mental health services are absent or culturally inappropriate (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).

In the Nigerian context, these challenges are intensified by persistent governance deficits, corruption, and limited institutional legitimacy. In Ebiraland, post-conflict challenges manifest not only in physical destruction and economic stagnation but also in fractured social relations, weakened traditional authority, and deep mistrust among clans and youth groups. These conditions directly undermine peacebuilding initiatives and raise critical questions about the sustainability of peace in the absence of inclusive and locally grounded interventions (Adetula & Iroanusi, 2021).

Opportunities in Post-Conflict Contexts

Despite these challenges, post-conflict periods also present significant opportunities for transformation and renewal. Collier et al. (2003) and the World Bank (2019) argue that post-conflict reconstruction can serve as a critical juncture for institutional reform, economic restructuring, and the renegotiation of social contracts between citizens and the state. When effectively harnessed, such periods can enable societies to address the root causes of conflict rather than merely managing its symptoms.

At the local level, post-conflict contexts offer opportunities for strengthening traditional institutions, revitalising indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and fostering community participation in governance. In Ebiraland, the post-conflict environment provides a platform for reasserting the role of traditional rulers, clan heads, and community associations in peacebuilding processes. It also creates space for youth engagement programmes, civic education, and economic initiatives aimed at reducing the structural drivers of violence. However, the realisation of these opportunities depends on deliberate policy choices, sustained political will, and the meaningful inclusion of local actors in peacebuilding frameworks.

Conceptualising Peacebuilding

Peace is often narrowly defined as the absence of war or organised violence, a conception commonly referred to as negative peace. However, scholars such as Galtung argue that sustainable peace extends beyond the cessation of hostilities to encompass positive peace, characterised by social justice, equitable development, and harmonious social relations (Ibrahim, 2022). Peacebuilding, therefore, represents a long-term and multidimensional process rather than a discrete post-conflict intervention. (Boege, Brown & Clements, 2021)

The concept of peacebuilding gained prominence following Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace (1992), which framed it as post-conflict action aimed at preventing relapse into violence by strengthening institutions and social structures. While this framework provided a useful starting point, critics note that it adopts a top-down, state-centric perspective that often neglects local realities and indigenous capacities (Barnett et al., 2007). Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasises the importance of locally driven peacebuilding

approaches that prioritise reconciliation, social healing, and community ownership of peace processes.

Olewuezi (2022) conceptualises peacebuilding as a holistic process encompassing conflict prevention, resolution, stabilisation, and peace consolidation. Central to this perspective is the recognition that sustainable peace requires the rehabilitation of war-affected societies, the repair of damaged relationships, and the active participation of local actors in designing and implementing interventions. This study adopts this broader understanding of peacebuilding, focusing specifically on local-level initiatives and their capacity to address the structural and relational dimensions of post-conflict recovery in Ebiraland.

Thematic Literature Review

Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Societies

Scholarly engagement with peacebuilding in post-conflict societies has evolved significantly over the past three decades. Early approaches, largely influenced by liberal peace theory, emphasised state reconstruction, democratic elections, market reforms, and security sector reform as pathways to sustainable peace. Proponents argue that rebuilding formal institutions and promoting liberal democratic norms reduce the likelihood of conflict relapse (Collier et al., 2003; World Bank, 2019). However, critics contend that such approaches are often externally driven, technocratic, and insufficiently attentive to local social realities, thereby producing fragile and unsustainable peace outcomes (MacGinty & Richmond, 2020).

Contemporary peacebuilding literature increasingly recognises peace as a socially embedded process that must address structural inequalities, historical grievances, and damaged relationships. Barnett et al. (2007) argue that peacebuilding should be understood not merely as post-war intervention but as a long-term process of social transformation. This perspective shifts analytical attention from institutional design alone to the lived experiences of conflict-affected communities, highlighting the importance of reconciliation, trust-building, and social cohesion.

Local and Indigenous Approaches to Peacebuilding

A growing body of literature challenges the dominance of top-down peacebuilding models by emphasising the role of local and indigenous mechanisms in sustaining peace. Lederach's conflict transformation approach foregrounds local actors, cultural resources, and relational dimensions of peace, arguing that sustainable peace emerges through inclusive dialogue, moral imagination, and the transformation of relationships rather than the mere resolution of issues (Lederach, 1997).

Studies across Africa demonstrate that traditional institutions, community elders, religious leaders, and informal networks often possess greater legitimacy and conflict management capacity than formal state structures, particularly in post-conflict environments characterised by weak governance (Ibrahim, 2022). These locally embedded actors are often better positioned to mediate disputes, facilitate reconciliation, and enforce social norms, making them indispensable to long-term peacebuilding.

Empirical Studies on Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Empirical research on peacebuilding in Nigeria reveals a mixed record of post-conflict interventions. Studies on the Niger Delta amnesty programme, for example, show that while disarmament and reintegration reduced immediate violence, failure to address unemployment, environmental degradation, and political exclusion limited the sustainability of peace (Ibrahim, 2022). Similarly, research on communal conflicts in the Middle Belt

highlights the persistence of violence where peacebuilding efforts neglect local power dynamics and youth marginalisation (Sadiq, 2022).

In northern Nigeria, responses to insurgency-related conflicts illustrate the limitations of militarised approaches in the absence of community engagement and reconciliation initiatives. Ebimiebo (2022) demonstrates that security-focused interventions without parallel social and economic reforms tend to displace rather than resolve violence.

Gaps in Existing Literature and Justification for the Study

Despite extensive scholarship on post-conflict peacebuilding, notable gaps remain. First, much of the Nigerian literature focuses on large-scale conflicts and federal-level interventions, with limited attention to local-level peacebuilding processes in relatively homogeneous societies such as Ebiraland. Second, existing studies often privilege formal institutions while under-theorising the role of traditional authorities, community associations, and indigenous practices in sustaining peace. Third, empirical engagement with post-conflict recovery in Ebiraland remains sparse, fragmented, and largely descriptive.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a context-specific, empirically grounded analysis of local-level peacebuilding in Ebiraland. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence from interviews and community experiences, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how peace is constructed, maintained, and challenged in post-conflict Nigerian societies.

Thematic Literature Review

Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Societies

Scholarly engagement with peacebuilding in post-conflict societies has evolved significantly over the past three decades. Early approaches, largely influenced by liberal peace theory, emphasised state reconstruction, democratic elections, market reforms, and security sector reform as pathways to sustainable peace. Proponents argue that rebuilding formal institutions and promoting liberal democratic norms reduce the likelihood of conflict relapse (Collier et al., 2003; World Bank, 2019). However, critics contend that such approaches are often externally driven, technocratic, and insufficiently attentive to local social realities, thereby producing fragile and unsustainable peace outcomes (MacGinty & Richmond, 2020).

Contemporary peacebuilding literature increasingly recognises peace as a socially embedded process that must address structural inequalities, historical grievances, and damaged relationships. Barnett et al. (2007) argue that peacebuilding should be understood not merely as post-war intervention but as a long-term process of social transformation. This perspective shifts analytical attention from institutional design alone to the lived experiences of conflict-affected communities, highlighting the importance of reconciliation, trust-building, and social cohesion.

Local and Indigenous Approaches to Peacebuilding

A growing body of literature challenges the dominance of top-down peacebuilding models by emphasising the role of local and indigenous mechanisms in sustaining peace. Lederach's conflict transformation approach foregrounds local actors, cultural resources, and relational dimensions of peace, arguing that sustainable peace emerges through inclusive dialogue, moral imagination, and the transformation of relationships rather than the mere resolution of issues (Lederach, 1997).

Studies across Africa demonstrate that traditional institutions, community elders, religious leaders, and informal networks often possess greater legitimacy and conflict management capacity than formal state structures, particularly in post-conflict environments characterised by weak governance (Ibrahim, 2022). These locally embedded actors are often better positioned to mediate disputes, facilitate reconciliation, and enforce social norms, making them indispensable to long-term peacebuilding.

Empirical Studies on Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Empirical research on peacebuilding in Nigeria reveals a mixed record of post-conflict interventions. Studies on the Niger Delta amnesty programme, for example, show that while disarmament and reintegration reduced immediate violence, failure to address unemployment, environmental degradation, and political exclusion limited the sustainability of peace (Ibrahim, 2022). Similarly, research on communal conflicts in the Middle Belt highlights the persistence of violence where peacebuilding efforts neglect local power dynamics and youth marginalisation (Sadiq, 2022).

In northern Nigeria, responses to insurgency-related conflicts illustrate the limitations of militarised approaches in the absence of community engagement and reconciliation initiatives. Ebimiebo (2022) demonstrates that security-focused interventions without parallel social and economic reforms tend to displace rather than resolve violence.

Gaps in Existing Literature and Justification for the Study

Despite extensive scholarship on post-conflict peacebuilding, notable gaps remain. First, much of the Nigerian literature focuses on large-scale conflicts and federal-level interventions, with limited attention to local-level peacebuilding processes in relatively homogeneous societies such as Ebiraland. Second, existing studies often privilege formal institutions while under-theorising the role of traditional authorities, community associations, and indigenous practices in sustaining peace. Third, empirical engagement with post-conflict recovery in Ebiraland remains sparse, fragmented, and largely descriptive.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a context-specific, empirically grounded analysis of local-level peacebuilding in Ebiraland. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence from interviews and community experiences, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how peace is constructed, maintained, and challenged in post-conflict Nigerian societies.

Theoretical Framework

A theory provides a systematic explanation of social phenomena by identifying patterns, causal mechanisms, and underlying assumptions that shape human behaviour and social outcomes. In examining violent conflict and peacebuilding in Ebiraland, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines Frustration–Aggression Theory, the Innate Theory of Conflict, and John Paul Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation. Together, these perspectives enable a holistic understanding of both the causes of violent conflict and the processes through which sustainable peace can be built in post-conflict societies.

Frustration–Aggression Theory

The Frustration–Aggression Theory was initially developed by Dollard and his colleagues in 1939 to explain the psychological roots of aggressive behaviour. The theory posits that frustration arises when individuals or groups are blocked from achieving desired goals, and that such frustration generates a propensity toward aggression. Although later scholars have refined this position by acknowledging that frustration does not always result in direct aggression, the theory remains influential in explaining how socio-economic deprivation,

political exclusion, and blocked opportunities can precipitate violent behaviour (Best, 2006; Ebimiebo, 2022).

In the context of Ebiraland, the theory is particularly relevant for understanding youth involvement in violent conflicts. Persistent unemployment, poverty, and political marginalisation have generated widespread frustration among able-bodied youths, who are often mobilised by political actors and clan leaders to engage in violent activities. Where legitimate channels for expressing grievances are weak or inaccessible, aggression becomes a means of venting accumulated frustration. Thus, the Frustration–Aggression Theory provides a useful explanatory framework for analysing the immediate triggers and motivations underlying violent conflicts in the area.

Innate Theory of Conflict

The Innate Theory of Conflict, rooted in biological and psychological explanations of human behaviour, posits that conflict is an inherent feature of social interaction. Drawing on classical thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Sigmund Freud, this perspective suggests that humans possess instinctive tendencies toward competition and aggression, particularly in contexts of scarcity and insecurity (Sadiq, 2022). From this standpoint, conflict is not an aberration but a natural outcome of human interaction over contested resources, power, and identity.

Applied to Ebiraland, the Innate Theory of Conflict helps explain the recurrence and intensity of violent clashes, even among culturally homogeneous groups. The theory underscores how competition among clans, political factions, and youth groups can escalate into violence when regulatory institutions are weak and social norms are eroded. However, while this perspective sheds light on the persistence of conflict, it offers limited guidance on how societies can move beyond violence toward reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation

To address the limitations of the Frustration–Aggression and Innate Theories in explaining peacebuilding processes, this study integrates John Paul Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation. Lederach conceptualises conflict not merely as a problem to be resolved but as a dynamic social process that can be transformed through changes in relationships, attitudes, structures, and patterns of interaction. Central to this approach is the emphasis on long-term peacebuilding, local ownership, and the active participation of grassroots actors, including traditional leaders, religious figures, women, and youths (Lederach, 1997).

Lederach's framework is particularly relevant to post-conflict Ebiraland, where sustainable peace depends on repairing fractured relationships among clans, rebuilding trust in traditional institutions, and fostering inclusive dialogue across generational and political divides. Unlike state-centric or security-focused models, conflict transformation prioritises reconciliation, social healing, and the creation of spaces for constructive engagement. It recognises that peacebuilding must occur simultaneously at multiple levels elite, middle-range, and grassroots to be effective and enduring.

By integrating Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation with the Frustration–Aggression and Innate Theories, this study develops a robust analytical framework that captures both the drivers of violent conflict and the mechanisms for sustainable peacebuilding. While the first two theories explain why violence emerges and persists, conflict transformation provides the conceptual tools for analysing how Ebiraland has navigated its post-conflict transition and how local-level peacebuilding initiatives can be strengthened to prevent future violence.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to generate an in-depth understanding of violent conflict dynamics and peacebuilding processes in Ebiraland. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for exploring perceptions, experiences, and meanings attributed to conflict and post-conflict recovery by affected actors within their social context.

Data Sources and Methods of Collection

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews targeted purposively selected participants, including traditional rulers, clan leaders, community elders, youth leaders, civil society actors, and local government officials, based on their roles and experience in conflict and peacebuilding processes. Focus group discussions were conducted with community members and youth groups to capture collective perspectives, shared experiences, and intra-community dynamics related to violence and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Secondary data were sourced from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports, policy documents, newspapers, and credible online materials relevant to post-conflict societies and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the selection of participants with relevant knowledge and experience. This approach enabled the study to obtain rich, context-specific data from actors directly involved in, or affected by, violent conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives in Ebiraland.

Method of Data Analysis

Data generated from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically. This involved transcribing responses, coding recurring themes, and interpreting patterns in relation to the research questions and objectives. Documentary materials were analysed through qualitative content analysis to complement primary data and enhance triangulation. The analytical process was guided by the integrated theoretical framework, allowing for systematic interpretation of findings within established conflict and peacebuilding perspectives.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and analyses the findings of the study in relation to the research questions and objectives. Drawing on data generated through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the discussion adopts a thematic approach to examine the causes of violent conflict, the socio-economic consequences of violence, and the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions in post-conflict Ebiraland. The integration of empirical evidence with relevant theoretical insights enhances the analytical depth and credibility of the findings.

Causes and Dynamics of Violent Conflicts in Ebiraland

Findings from interviews and focus group discussions reveal that violent conflicts in Ebiraland are primarily driven by political rivalry, youth unemployment, clannish divisions, and the erosion of traditional conflict management mechanisms. Participants consistently identified political mobilisation of unemployed youths as a central factor in the escalation of violence, particularly during electoral periods. Respondents noted that political actors often exploit socio-economic grievances by providing financial incentives, weapons, and protection to youths, thereby transforming political competition into violent confrontation.

This finding aligns with the Frustration–Aggression Theory, which explains how prolonged socio-economic deprivation and political exclusion generate frustration that is redirected into aggression. The prevalence of small arms and locally fabricated weapons further lowers the threshold for violence, enabling relatively minor disputes to escalate into large-scale clashes. Interviewees also emphasised that the breakdown of communal norms and weakening of traditional authority structures have reduced the effectiveness of indigenous mechanisms for conflict prevention (Abbink & van Kessel, 2022).

Socio-Economic and Psychological Effects of Violent Conflict

The study reveals that recurrent violent conflicts have had profound socio-economic and psychological consequences for the people of Ebiraland. Respondents reported widespread destruction of residential buildings, markets, and small-scale businesses, leading to loss of livelihoods and long-term economic stagnation. Many participants recounted experiences of forced displacement, noting that families were compelled to flee their communities during periods of intense violence, sometimes for extended durations (Tol, Song & Jordans, 2021).

Women and children emerged as the most vulnerable groups, bearing disproportionate burdens of the conflicts. Female respondents highlighted the loss of spouses, increased caregiving responsibilities, and the destruction of economic assets such as market stalls and farm produce. These experiences corroborate existing literature that identifies women and children as primary victims in communal conflicts (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). The psychological impact of violence, including fear, trauma, and mistrust, was also repeatedly emphasised, with respondents noting that such effects persist long after physical hostilities have ceased.

Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Local-Level Interventions

Findings indicate that post-conflict peacebuilding in Ebiraland has largely been driven by local-level initiatives involving traditional rulers, clan heads, community associations, and youth organisations. Interview participants described the role of traditional authorities in convening dialogue forums, mediating disputes, and enforcing informal sanctions against violent behaviour. Monthly consultative meetings organised by the paramount ruler and supported by clan leaders were identified as critical platforms for monitoring tensions and preventing conflict relapse.

Community-based structures, including town unions and youth associations, have also played a significant role in peacebuilding by promoting sensitisation campaigns, discouraging retaliatory violence, and facilitating cooperation among rival groups. During electoral periods, civil society and community organisations reportedly intensified awareness programmes aimed at reducing political bitterness and fostering post-election reconciliation.

These findings resonate strongly with Lederach's Theory of Conflict Transformation, which emphasises the centrality of local actors, relational repair, and sustained engagement in building durable peace. Rather than relying solely on state-led security interventions, peacebuilding in Ebiraland has involved continuous dialogue, trust-building, and the reintegration of marginalised youths into community life. However, respondents also noted that these efforts remain fragile, particularly in the absence of comprehensive economic empowerment programmes and consistent state support.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Objectives

The findings of this study demonstrate that violent conflict in Ebiraland is not merely the product of innate aggression or spontaneous violence but is deeply embedded in socio-economic deprivation, political manipulation, and institutional weaknesses. While local

peacebuilding initiatives have contributed to a reduction in overt violence, their sustainability is constrained by persistent unemployment, arms proliferation, and limited coordination between state and community actors (Adetula & Iroanusi, 2021).

By situating these findings within the integrated theoretical framework, the study illustrates how frustration-induced aggression and innate competitive tendencies can be mitigated through conflict transformation processes that prioritise reconciliation, inclusion, and structural reform. The Ebiraland experience underscores the importance of local-level peacebuilding as a necessary complement to formal state interventions in post-conflict societies.

The following are the key findings of this study:

1. One major finding is the division of the Ebira community along clan lines.
2. Masquerades and youths have engaged in the unleashing of violence against unsuspecting individuals.
3. An army of unemployed, able-bodied, and economically disadvantaged young men was exploited for political purposes.
4. The state demonstrates limited capacity to design and implement effective policies to address underlying social malaise.
5. The cycles of violent conflict in Ebiraland have negatively affected the socio-economic organization of the community.
6. Women and children constitute the primary victims of violence in Ebiraland; many women have become widows with added responsibilities for child-rearing, while industrious women have suffered the destruction of their wares and marketplaces during attacks by youth groups.
7. Although Ebira is now a post-conflict community, evidence suggests that the land has not yet fully recovered.

Conclusion

Arms racketeering, facilitated by political godfathers and blacksmiths, has been a major driver of violence in Ebiraland, manifesting through attacks on individuals and communities as well as fratricidal conflicts across clannish, cultural, and political lines. This pervasive violence has significantly tarnished the image of the Ebira people, creating a hostile environment for investment and impeding prospects for socio-economic development. As Shaibu (1999, p. 105) notes, "If we refuse to pay the price of peace and stability for our polity, we may unwittingly incur a higher cost in civil strife and disorder, where development will remain a distant aspiration."

The post-conflict challenges in Ebiraland underscore the complexity of peacebuilding in a community marked by deep divisions. While some interventions have demonstrated positive outcomes, sustainable peace necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates security measures, justice mechanisms, developmental initiatives, and social reconciliation efforts.

Recommendations

Sociologists suggest that lasting social change is rarely achieved through sermons alone; rather, it requires the comprehensive and voluntary reconstruction of the social environment (Shaibu, 1999). In the context of Ebiraland, several key strategies emerge to address post-conflict challenges and foster sustainable peace:

1. **Employment and Economic Opportunities:** High unemployment is strongly associated with social unrest, and many participants in violent activities have historically been unemployed youth. The establishment of industries, alongside a robust educational system, is essential to provide meaningful employment opportunities and reduce the lure of violence.

2. **Revitalization of Societal Values:** The erosion of core Ebira values, such as good character, hard work, honesty, respect for authority, and communal responsibility, requires deliberate efforts to restore these norms. Strengthening the family unit and promoting marital stability are critical, as children raised in disrupted households are more susceptible to engaging in antisocial behavior. Traditional rulers and social welfare agencies have an important role in monitoring and supporting these initiatives.

3. **Cultural Reforms:** Ebira cultural festivals must be re-engineered to eliminate elements prone to violence while preserving their heritage value. Traditional custodians of culture should be empowered to assert their roles, ensuring that festivals promote unity, attract tourism, and foster peaceful social interaction.

4. **Proactive Governance and Security:** The state government must adopt preventive measures against potential violence rather than responding reactively. Effective arms control, including the retrieval of weapons from private homes and stricter regulation of local blacksmiths producing firearms, is essential to curbing armed conflicts.

5. **Responsible Political Leadership:** Political actors and clan leaders must cease supplying arms to miscreants. Addressing the dual sources of arm proliferation, political patronage and locally manufactured weapons, is crucial, and law enforcement agencies must enforce the law firmly.

6. **Youth Reorientation and Social Re-engineering:** Transforming the mindset of youths from violent behavior to constructive engagement is fundamental. Through dialogue, consultation, and civic education, young people can be mobilized to reject violence and actively participate in community-building. Organizations such as the Ebira Peoples Association (EPA) and the Ebira Youth Congress (EYC) play a vital role in sustaining these efforts through education, campaigns, and advocacy.

References

Abbink, J., & van Kessel, I. (2022). Youth, violence and political mobilisation in Africa. *African Affairs, 121*(482), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab046

Abdulsalam, I. (2004). Addressing the culture of violence in Ebiraland. Paper presented at the 3rd Ebira National Youth Summit, Inoziomi–Adavi Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Adetula, V. A. O., & Iroanusi, S. (2021). Post-conflict peacebuilding and governance in Nigeria. *African Security, 14*(3), 253–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1956732

Alemika, E. E. O. (2011). Post-conflict peacebuilding in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Security Review, 20*(1), 25–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2011.561020

Barnett, M., Kim, H., O'Donnell, M., & Sitea, L. (2007). Peacebuilding: What is in a name? *Global Governance, 13*(1), 35–58.

Best, S. G. (2006). The methods of conflict resolution and transformation. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T., & Huyse, L. (2003). *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Boege, V., Brown, M. A., & Clements, K. (2021). Hybrid political orders and peacebuilding: Lessons from Africa. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 16*(2), 159–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166211011046

Collier, P., Elliott, V. L., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Reynal-Querol, M., & Sambanis, N. (2003). *Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy*. World Bank.

de Coning, C. (2020). Adaptive peacebuilding. *International Affairs, 96*(2), 301–318. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz253.

Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and aggression*. Yale University Press.

Ebimiebo, A. I. (2022). Boko Haram insurgency and regional security responses in Nigeria. *Journal of Peace and Security Studies, 6*(2), 77–95.

Ibrahim, U. (2022). Peacebuilding and the challenge of post-conflict recovery in Nigeria. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 22*(1), 91–115.

Japa, M. I. (2007). Relevance of citizenship education in stemming conflicts in Nigeria: The Ebira experience. *Confluence Journal of Education, 3*(1), 45–58.

Japa, M. I. (2008). Violence and development in Ebiraland: A critical reflection. *Journal of Teacher Perspective, 2*(1), 21–34.

Japa, M. I. (2011). Youth restiveness and internal security challenges in Ebiraland. *NASHER Journal, 9*(2), 66–82.

Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.

Mac Ginty, R., & Richmond, O. P. (2020). The local turn in peacebuilding: A critical agenda for peace. *Third World Quarterly, 41*(5), 763–783. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1706448

Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2010). War exposure, daily stressors, and mental health in conflict and post-conflict settings. *Social Science & Medicine, 70*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.09.007

Okene, A. A. (2008). Security and sustainable development in contemporary Ebiraland. Paper presented at the 7th Ebira National Youth Summit, Abuja, Nigeria.

Olewuezi, I. P. (2022). Community-driven peacebuilding in post-conflict Nigeria: Lessons from local societies. *Journal of African Peacebuilding, 4*(1), 55–72.

Sadiq, S. A. (2022). Grassroots peacebuilding and the management of protracted communal conflicts in North-Central Nigeria. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review, 12*(2), 113–134. https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.12.2.07

Suleiman, J. (2006). *Ebira: A people at war with itself*. Safimo Publishers.

Tol, W., Song, S., & Jordans, M. J. D. (2021). Annual research review: Resilience and mental health in conflict-affected populations. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 62*(9), 1074–1092. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13399

United Nations Development Programme. (2008). *Post-conflict economic recovery: Enabling local ingenuity*. UNDP.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2020*. UNHCR.

World Bank. (2019). *World development report 2019: The changing nature of work*. World Bank.

World Health Organization. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. WHO.

World Health Organization. (2012). *Violence prevention: The evidence*. WHO.