

Uneasy Calm in a Vanquished Region: Imperatives for Peacebuilding in Southeast, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The quest for sustainable peace remains a major challenge in societies marked by historical grievances, political exclusion, social inequality and recurrent tensions. In Southeastern Nigeria, the enduring legacies of the 1967–1970 Nigeria-Biafra War, perceptions of marginalization and deprivation, and the emergence of renewed separatist agitations have continued to raise concerns about the prospects for durable peace. Against this background, this paper critically examines the relevance and imperatives of peacebuilding in Southeastern Nigeria. The paper adopts a qualitative, conceptual and critical research approach based on the review and synthesis of secondary sources, including scholarly literature, historical and political studies, policy documents, and publications of relevant international and national organizations. Through thematic synthesis and contextual interpretation, the paper examines the concept and major models of peacebuilding, its political context, the historical problem of marginalization and alienation in the region, and the potential contributions of community-based and indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms. The analysis argues that sustainable peace in Southeastern Nigeria cannot be achieved through the suppression or management of immediate manifestations of conflict alone; rather, it requires sustained attention to the structural and historical conditions that reproduce grievances and alienation. The paper further argues that effective peacebuilding should combine reconciliation, socio-economic and political equity, participatory governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, responsive leadership, civic education, accountability, strengthened community institutions and the constructive incorporation of indigenous mechanisms. It concludes that peacebuilding in the region must be nationally owned, context-sensitive, inclusive and oriented towards addressing both negative and positive dimensions of peace. The paper therefore provides practical peacebuilding imperatives that can inform policy, institutional reform and community-level initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable peace in Southeastern Nigeria.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Southeastern Nigeria, Vanquished Region, Marginalization

INTRODUCTION

The concept of peacebuilding was introduced in the academic lexicon long before it became consensual in the world of policymaking. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian who is considered the founder of Peace Studies, first introduced this term in his 1976 article “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding,” setting the tone for the theoretical and operational exploration that would follow a few years later and which still remains prolific today (Cravo, 2018; Garba, 2016; Olatayo, 2025). Today, peacebuilding is one of the United Nations prime models of peace process. The concept was made globally popular in Boutros-Ghali’s An Agenda for Peace. Boutros Ghali wrote this paper in 1992, while he was the United Nations Secretary General (Garba, 2016; United Nations, 2025a). Peace building involves addressing not only the triggers, which are the direct variables that mechanize the eruption of any armed conflict. For example, the assassination of some political leaders as it occurred in Nigeria, during the first coup, triggered power struggle in the Nigerian military within the framework of regional divides, which culminated in the counter coup saga and eventual outbreak of civil war in the country (Kasali, 2006). Since then, peace situation in Nigerian state has remained more fragile and viable peacebuilding measures should be the primary responsibility of all and sundry. These proximate causes of conflict are only those factors that could be said to be responsible for the outburst of a given conflict. Root causes are the major structural or underlying causes of such conflict, which are instrumental, but not sufficient to accentuate violent situation. By and large, peace building does not only take care of the triggers, but also addresses the root causes of the conflict in order to generate true and sustainable reconciliation and peaceful co-existence (Kasali, 2006; Olatayo, 2025; United Nations, 2024). Accordingly, Tschirgi (1996) had observed that if Third world conflicts have a common thread, it is the inability of the existing political institutions of a society to accommodate, mediate and respond to the pressures arising from profound social transformation and cleavages which accompany rapid socio-economic change. This observation is still very much relevant in today’s world (Kobayashi et al., 2025).

The paper is organized into interconnected sections. Following this introduction and the research approach, it first conceptualizes peacebuilding and examines some of its major models. It then considers the political context of peacebuilding and the historical marginalization and alienation of Southeastern Nigeria, before examining community-based and indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms. The paper subsequently identifies key elements necessary for effective peacebuilding in the region and concludes by drawing together the major arguments and proposing context-sensitive imperatives for sustainable peace in Southeastern Nigeria.

Research Approach

This paper adopts a qualitative, conceptual and critical research approach based on the review and synthesis of secondary sources. It is not an empirical study or systematic review; rather, it critically examines peacebuilding and applies insights from existing literature to the historical, political and socio-economic circumstances of Southeastern Nigeria. Sources of information include scholarly and conceptual publications on peacebuilding and conflict management, historical and political studies, policy documents, and publications of relevant international and national organizations. These sources provide the conceptual foundations and contextual evidence for the discussion of peacebuilding, marginalization, community-based approaches and indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms.

The arguments are developed through critical thematic synthesis and contextual interpretation of the reviewed literature, focusing particularly on the causes and dynamics of conflict, the political and historical context of Southeastern Nigeria, and the institutional, community-based and indigenous mechanisms relevant to sustainable peace. The recommendations are consequently derived from this synthesis rather than from primary empirical data. They translate the identified peacebuilding principles and contextual insights into proposed measures relating to equity, participatory governance, human rights, reconciliation, responsive leadership, civic education, accountability and stronger community-based institutions.

Overall, the approach is qualitative, conceptual, critical and policy-oriented, enabling the paper to connect established peacebuilding scholarship with the specific realities of Southeastern Nigeria and formulate context-sensitive peacebuilding imperatives.

Conceptualization of Peacebuilding

There are many possible definitions of peacebuilding and varying opinions about what it involves. The term itself first emerged over 30 years ago through the work of Johan Galtung, who called for the creation of peacebuilding structures to promote sustainable peace by addressing the “root causes” of violent conflict and supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution (OECD, 2010; United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010; Ragandang, 2024). The contemporary peacebuilding literature continues to debate the boundaries, assumptions and appropriate scope of the concept, particularly in relation to structural causes of conflict and alternative forms of locally grounded peacebuilding (Kobayashi et al., 2025; Magara, 2025).

The Free Encyclopaedia Wikipedia cited in Osisioma (2016), defines peace building as an intervention designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating a sustainable peace. It addresses the root causes or potential causes of violence, creates a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution, and stabilizes society both politically, socially and economically. Thus, successful peace building activities:

- create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace;
- reconcile opponents;
- prevent resumption of conflicts; integrate civil society;
- create rule of law mechanisms; and,
- address underlying structural and societal issues (United Nations, 2025a; Olatayo, 2025).

Peace building can come in form of direct effort that focusses intentionally on the factors driving or mitigating conflict, in an attempt to reduce structural or direct violence. Alternatively, it may refer to efforts to coordinate a multi-level, multi-sectoral strategy that includes the funding and proper communication and coordination mechanisms between humanitarian assistance, development, governance, security, justice and other sectors within the polity (United Nations, 2025a; Olatayo, 2025).

Common to all existing definitions is the agreement that improving human security is the central task of peacebuilding. In this sense, peacebuilding includes a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society at the community, national, and international levels to address the root causes of violence and ensure civilians have freedom from fear (negative peace), freedom from want (positive peace) and freedom from humiliation before, during, and after violent conflict (OECD, 2010; United Nations, 2025a; English & Rubenstein, 2025).

Peace-building becomes strategic when it works over the long run and at all levels of society to establish and sustain relationships among people locally and globally. Strategic peace-building connects people and groups with policymakers and powerbrokers, aims to resolve conflicts, and seeks to build societies, institutions, policies, and relationships that are better able to sustain peace and justice. Strategic peace-building addresses issues of human rights, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability as well as violence (Osisioma, 2016; United Nations, 2025a; Ganson, 2026).

In this vein, Tschirgi (1996) carefully observes that despite the variations among them, several critical assumptions underlie the different conceptions of peacebuilding as follows:

- violent local or regional conflicts in the developing countries have important international repercussions; while such conflicts do not necessarily pose direct security threats, they place significant strain on the international community, especially the U.N. system;
- the international community has an important role to play in the full range of tasks broadly associated with peacebuilding, from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction;
- effective peacebuilding requires concerted action on the part of the international community;
- peacebuilding involves strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to resolve problems without resort to violence;
- while peacebuilding might involve a menu of short-term tasks or activities, its ultimate goal has to be to facilitate long-term stability and development (United Nations, 2025a; Kobayashi et al., 2025)

Furthermore, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2010), maintains that peacebuilding should encompass economic, political, social, human rights and security efforts. The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2010), defines peacebuilding in the following terms:

Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010, p. 5; United Nations, 2025a)

The above definition lays emphasis on the prevention of negative peace, which entails increasing violence and armed conflict, and the promotion of positive peace dynamics through the provision of the diverse range of human needs. The concept of peacebuilding in conflict and peace management is a viable means of preventing the possible outbreak of armed conflict. It is also a way of guarding against its reoccurrence, continuation and other emergencies in political development, humanitarian and human rights mechanism (Okoro, 2012; Karame, 2004 cited in Elachi, 2018). The above definition, therefore, implies that the process of peacebuilding involves both pre-conflict and post-conflict stages. The main aim of peacebuilding is to lay a sustainable foundation for peace in a society that has experienced conflict. The focus of peacebuilding is the economic, social, and psychological universe of the ordinary people (Karame, 2004 cited in Elachi, 2018). Against this backdrop, the peacebuilding process recruits actors from all levels of society. The domain of peacebuilding is “quite complex and diverse” and has generated controversies based on methodology. Formal and informal methods have been distinguished in the peacebuilding process (Diala, 2026; Akintayo, 2026).

Peacebuilding represents a commitment to laying down in clear terms the conditions for a largely peaceful. The process of peacebuilding commences when violent hostilities have ceased. The peacebuilding process may involve action to “disarm previously warring parties or factions, repatriating refugees, monitoring of slated elections, human rights advancement, strengthening government institutions, encouraging civil society” etc. (Mische & Harris, 2008, p. 6; United Nations, 2025a)

The process of peacebuilding is connected to the notion of negative and positive peace in so far as it aims to ensure that physical violence and warfare do not reoccur. And this is done in a way that examines and addresses the causative factors

that that promote structural violence and cases of social injustice that gives rise to conflict. For peacebuilding to produce the required results, peace educators emphasize strategies that discourage norms and institutions that perpetuate conflict and violence. Rather they choose to promote norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, laws, institutions and policies that foster social justice and sustainable peace. The ultimate aim is to enhance political discourse and also set new standards of social justice that ensure the promotion of human rights as envisaged by the United Nations. Peacebuilding makes a radical departure from the old dictum that recommends that if you want peace, prepare for war to the new notion that says if you want peace to prepare for peace (Mische & Harris, 2008; English & Rubenstein, 2025; Ganson, 2026).

Some Models of Peacebuilding

Various models of peacebuilding exist in the literature. Some of these models are quite familiar with the United Nations on account of their ability to address a combination of issues ranging from education, peacebuilding and evaluation. They include the United Nations peacebuilding model, the Oliver Ramsbotham peacebuilding model, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall's transformative cosmopolitan peace building model. This model pointedly recommends the application of peace education as a formative strategy for peacebuilding (Adan, 2025). Others include the John Lederach's reflective, integrative peacebuilding model. Peace consolidation according to the United Nations is the ultimate purpose of peacebuilding and defined as "a process leading towards a self-sustaining peace." (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010, p. 13; United Nations, 2025a; Kobayashi et al., 2025).

The Political Context of Peacebuilding

Peace processes can advance, but they also often suffer periods of regression. So the success of peacebuilding depends in part on the political decisions of those involved (national and local governments, communities, donors, international organizations like the United Nations), in part on effective leadership (by national governments and within the United Nations as the case may be), and on resources like human capital or donor financing (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010; United Nations, 2025a; United Nations, 2025b).

In developing countries of the global south like Nigeria, it remains to be seen how committed political leadership can help the assuage the feelings of marginalization and deprivation among the people of south-eastern Nigeria who endured a genocidal and bloody civil war fought on their soil between 1967 and 1970 in a bid cecede from Nigeria and become a sovereign state of Biafra (Nwangwu, 2025; Igwenyere, 2026). Currently, the feelings of marginalization and deprivation are heightened in the region as the hausa-fulani political-class who have held on to the levers of power since the end of the civil war, have ensured that no south-easterner has emerged as sovereign head of the Nigerin state. In total negation of the federal character principle enshrined in the Nigerian constitution and a classic example of the absence of political will required for peacebuilding across the geo-political space of the nation (Osimen et al., 2025; Igwenyere, 2026; Nwangwu, 2025).

Core Features of Peacebuilding

National ownership: Peacebuilding is principally a national challenge and responsibility. It is the citizens of the countries where peacebuilding is underway, with support from their governments, who assume the responsibility for laying the foundations of lasting peace. National ownership is essential to success.

National capacity: National capacity development must be central to all international peacebuilding efforts from the very start, as part of the entry strategy, not the exit. Indeed, a core objective for peacebuilding is to reach as soon as possible the point when external assistance is no longer required, by ensuring that all initiatives support the development of national peacebuilding capacities. This is a challenge, especially in the early days when peace is fragile and national capacity is often displaced and severely limited. Nevertheless, peacebuilding must focus proactively on (re)building national capacity, otherwise peace will not be sustainable. To support this effort, a collective assessment of existing capacities should be conducted early on.

Common strategy: Inclusive peacebuilding involves many actors. The key to effective peacebuilding lies in an agreed common strategy, nationally owned, with clear priorities against which the UN, the international community and national partners can allocate resources. A common strategy should be:

- Nationally owned, derived from an inclusive planning process, with many and diverse stakeholders consulted as the strategy is developed; and
- Based on an assessment of the country's situation (e.g. through a Post-Conflict Needs Assessment or Strategic Assessment) including analysis of conflict drivers and risk.

The Problem of Historical Marginalization and Alienation of South East Nigeria

According to the political anthropologist, Godwin Onuoha (2018), the place of the Igbo ethnic group and its perceived second-class citizenship in Nigeria has become more contentious in contemporary times. A proper articulation and understanding of the “Igbo Question” must be carried out within the context of the overarching Nigerian “National Question.” The “Igbo Question,” emanating from post-civil war memories of marginalization, hurt, and injustice, should not be treated as unique or as the only example of its kind. Rather, it should be examined within the related and comparable contexts of the failure of other state-imposed post-war peace-building projects in Africa. Thus, the “Igbo Question” reflects broader issues of state legitimacy, national citizenship-deficit, and the failure of the postcolonial nation-state building project. The “Igbo Question” is a subset of the broader Nigerian “National Question,” outside of which it can hardly be understood. It is symbolic of ethnic identity struggles related to self-determination, autonomy, and separatism in the Nigerian state, drawing on issues and perspectives surrounding the salience, construction, mobilization, and politicization of ethnic identity and the dynamics of its deployment and use in national politics. The “Igbo Question” has been framed by situations, policies, and actions that produce grievances and the overwhelming feeling of the deprivation of “nationhood” and Igbo belonging within the context of the political arrangement in Nigeria. While the “Igbo Question” came to a head during the crises leading up to the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1967, it has assumed a different dimension in the post-civil war era (Onuoha, 2018; Osimen et al., 2025; Nwangwu, 2025; Igwenyere, 2026).

In the post-1999 dispensation, it has led to the emergence of neo-Biafran groups in South-eastern Nigeria and a renewed clamor for disengagement from the Nigerian state. Spurred by specific memories of marginalization, hurt, and injustice, Nigeria has witnessed the proliferation of neo-Biafran separatist movements clamoring for the disengagement of the Igbo from the Nigerian project into a separate political and administrative arrangement known as the “Republic of Biafra.” On September 13, 1999, barely four months after Nigeria’s return to civil rule, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) became the first neo-Biafran group to emerge that promoted the interest of Igbo-speaking Nigerians (or Biafrans). Several neo-Biafran groups such as the Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), MASSOB International, Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG), which claims to be an umbrella body comprising seven Igbo liberation groups in Nigeria and two in the diaspora, have since emerged. The advent of these groups is a direct response to the perceived failure of the Nigerian state and successive governments to address the Igbo predicament since the end of the civil war, let alone resolve it. The views of the neo-Biafran groups are often expressed publicly and in open violation of government order by taking up parallel governmental functions, engaging in various acts of civil disobedience, and challenging the absolute authority of the Nigerian state in Southeastern Nigeria. Tensions have been exacerbated by the emergence of Radio Biafra, an unlicensed station dedicated to the Biafran cause. The station has dominated the airwaves in Southeastern Nigeria and tapped into unresolved causes of the war to mobilize Igbo senses and sensibilities in the continued quest for Biafran independence. Accordingly, Onuoha (2018) recommends a paradigm shift in the notion and understanding of peacebuilding, from one that is not just about stabilizing the system to one that is concerned with “healing the society” (Onuoha, 2018; Obichili et al., 2025; Nwangwu, 2025; Nzeaka, 2025).

Key steps for Peacebuilding in Southeastern Nigeria

According to Kasali (2006), peacebuilding is achievable through the following important measures:

Reconciliation: Reconciliation remains a difficult task in peacebuilding because (in most cases) the parties will need to see some prospects in the whole reconciliatory exercise before they consent. Reconciliation as a concept of peacebuilding has received less attention in the literature in international relations and peace and conflict studies. Here, reconciliation refers to a process through which a disputing party seeks to establish structures and procedures capable of facilitating an enduring peace and mutual understanding with her old enemy in post conflict environment. Reconciliation isn't simply about apologizing for the past. It is also about recognizing that there is a valid claim on the part of the offended that his or her interest has been trampled upon while his or her needs not respected by the other (offender) party. We need to understand reconciliation not only as a peacebuilding process, but also as a viable mechanism that enhances dynamic social systems and creates opportunities for social energies and directions. Reconciliation is of course a relatively new concept in the new field of peace and conflict resolution. Due to the newness of the concept, it does not have any universally agreed definition. Reconciliation consists of at least four basic properties, which include truth, justice, mercy, and peace.

Apology and Forgiveness: Apology and forgiveness are very important elements of reconciliation and peace building. They are two sides of the same coin of emotions. The two concepts usually reflect the feelings and convictions, which characterize the conflict transformation initiatives and relationships of the disputing parties as one party will demonstrate a sense of maturity by portraying himself / herself as offender while the other party shows courage by portraying himself or herself as the victim. But in some circumstances, the offender presents himself or herself as victim in order to win public

sympathy and support. Apology and forgiveness enable former disputants to appreciate the pains and agonies that each of them suffered in the course of the conflict, which disrupted their communication, harmony and friendship.

Tendering sincere apologies and the courageous granting of forgiveness form the integral parts of any long-term resolution of any recalcitrant conflict situation and pro-active efforts towards peacebuilding. They form the basis for concrete reconciliation and sustainable peace. Offenders are supposed to know that they should admit responsibility for their actions, which might have caused injury or harm to their victims. If long term conflict resolution should be made, the offender is supposed to show remorse for the crime he/she perpetuated against the other party and tender unreserved apology and denounce any further crime against the victim in the nearest future. In the same vein, the other party considered as victim should demonstrate a large heartedness by forgiving the offender. Through this healing process will begin. The offender should also pay a restitution to make the victim's forgiveness a long lasting one. Thus restitution will further repair damage suffered by the victim as the victim is compensated for the specific consequences of a violation. Restitution also carries important symbolism as the offender actually tries to redeem his/her trustworthiness with concrete actions.

Reconstruction: Reconstruction enables the post conflict society to have 'another opportunity' through rebuilding of social infrastructures that were destroyed as a result of the bloody conflict. Lack of essential social amenities can regenerate a conflict situation and a lot of efforts should be geared towards creating a lively post conflict society.

Rehabilitation: Rehabilitation process affords the ex-combatants, the displaced population and refugees opportunities of demobilization and reintegration through provision of some strategic peace building measures like employment opportunities, creativity and vocational skill development, trauma-healing advice and support among others..

Types of community-based approaches for peacebuilding

According to Haider (2009) community-based approaches are relevant across many sectors. They can be applied to individual community-level projects or as a component of wider national programmes. They can be focused primarily on achieving development outcomes, such as service delivery and good governance. Although such interventions have the potential to contribute to securing peace, they do not necessarily result in peacebuilding. Rather, community-based peacebuilding interventions often seek to transform relationships; to collaborate with a wide range of actors beyond the development community, including diplomatic actors and in some cases, parties to the conflict; and to link to broader peace strategies. A project that aims to achieve development outcomes, such as service delivery, could be seen as a peacebuilding project, if it seeks as well to bring together groups across conflict divides to work together to fulfil the need for services. The following are some examples of the possible types of community-based approaches for peacebuilding enunciated by Haider (2009):

Security: Community-based policing is an approach that brings together the police, civil society and local communities to jointly take responsibility for and develop solutions to local safety and security. Community-based approaches have also been adopted for de-mining and weapons collection. De-mobilised combatants have been involved in de-mining as a way to facilitate local reintegration.

Socioeconomic recovery: Community-based approaches have been adopted to provide for services (health and education, in particular), infrastructure, natural resource and environmental management, livelihoods and employment generation – for example through the formation of cooperatives. Many of these initiatives have been designed and implemented with particular attention to fostering social capital, cooperation across divides, and the foundation for reintegration and reconciliatory processes.

Media communication and civic education: Community-based radio stations and other forms of media, broadcast in multiple languages, seek to promote dialogue and debate on key issues in society. Many also seek to promote reconciliatory processes and civic education. Community video units are another form of participatory communication, whereby people present their own ideas on key issues. Local videographers seek to promote social change by documenting the views and concerns of different groups in society such that they can learn about each other. Theatre productions and puppet shows, designed and conducted by communities, have also been used for outreach education – to teach peaceful dispute resolution and human rights norms and values.

Traditional justice and reconciliation: Traditional approaches to justice and reconciliation often focus on the psycho-social and spiritual dimensions of violent conflicts. Traditional approaches are also often inclusive, with the aim of reintegrating parties on both sides of the conflict into the community. An important component is public cleansing ceremonies, undertaken is an integral step in healing community relationships.

Heritage and cultural preservation: Initiatives designed to preserve culture in disaster and conflict-affected contexts have included community forums in order to allow for the articulation of local needs, quick responses on the ground, and increased social capital. Communities have also been involved in inventorying their culture, which has contributed to preservation and a sense of national identity.

Types of community-level institutions

At the core of community-based approaches is a representative community institution that can serve as a forum for discussion, decision-making and implementation of decisions (Haider, 2009). These institutions act as intermediaries between communities and local and national authorities; and between communities and external development agencies and implementing organisations (e.g. national or international non-governmental organisations). The following are prominent examples of community institutions:

Association: a group of people, frequently from differing kin groups, who work together for a common purpose and have a visible identity mainly through sectors (e.g. farmers', youth, widows, parent-teach associations). Associations facilitate self-help, mutual help, solidarity, and cooperation. They usually have clearly delineated structures, roles, and rules within which group members operate. (Colletta and Cullen, 2000 cited in Haider, 2009)

Cooperative: an autonomous voluntary association of people that work together for mutual economic, social, or cultural benefits through a jointly-owned and democratically- controlled enterprise.

Community-based organisation (CBO): an organisation that should ideally be representative of the community i.e. membership-based but consequently tending to vary dramatically in size and focus. CBOs may focus on a specific sector (e.g. Village Water Supply and Sanitation Committees) or multiple sectors (e.g. Community Development Councils). (Slaymaker, Christiansen & Hemming, 2005 cited in Haider, 2009). CBOs can also comprise the local arm of non-governmental organisations.

Village leadership: an official, traditional, and informal leader at the local level. Official leaders include the communal chief and the local government administration. Traditional leaders are usually people who are revered for their religious or spiritual attributes. Informal leaders carry influence due to wealth, special skills, or charisma. Official and traditional leaders play key roles in local political, social, religious, and welfare activities. (Colletta & Cullen, 2000 cited in Haider, 2009).

Civic association: a type of political organisation whose official goal is to improve neighbourhoods through volunteer work by its members.

The Role of Indigenous Agents of Peacebuilding

Lederach (1997:94) cited in Usang & Eloma (2014) believes that the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture. Parties should strive to understand the cultural dimension of conflict, and identify the mechanisms for handling conflict that exist within that cultural setting. Building on cultural resources and utilizing local mechanisms for handling disputes can be quite effective in resolving conflicts and transforming relationships. Initiatives that incorporate citizen-based peacebuilding include community peace projects in schools and villages, local peace commissions and problem-solving workshops, and a variety of other grassroots initiatives. Similarly Abebe (2013) cited in Usang & Eloma (2014) maintains that since the causes of conflict are different, it would be better to use different mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Therefore, more than anybody else governments, whose main duty is maintenance of peace and security, are responsible for providing their respective peoples with alternative conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, popular and widely used among these are the indigenous agents. He adds that indigenous mechanisms are time tested and effective to handle conflicts. Furthermore Maiese (2003) cited in Usang & Eloma (2014) opines that researchers and practitioners also increasingly find that peace building is most effective and durable when it relies upon local conceptions of peace and the underlying dynamics which foster or enable conflicts. In Calabar, like other parts of Nigeria, popular indigenous agents have not only functioned as peace building mechanisms and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) but have effectively prevented violent conflicts in the land. These include the EKPE Society and the grade system (Kifle & Mekonnen, 2025; Akpomuvie & Forae, 2025; Diala, 2026; Chukwu, 2026).

Advantages Of Indigenous Peacebuilding Mechanisms

Asebe (2013) cited in Usang & Eloma (2014) further argues that when compared with the non-indigenous ones, indigenous mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are less complex, save time, and give a chance to parties in

conflict to actively participate to solve their own problems and to handle their affairs in a relatively more acceptable way to them. Indigenous mechanisms are popular and they are widely used in almost all communities in Nigeria. They have different advantages including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Quick response to crisis; reduce regular court caseloads, and saves public money.
2. Given the shortage of judges who work in the regular courts and budget constraints, they are complementary to the modern government structures and are not substitutes or competitors as some government officials think and worry about.
3. They give access to many people who do not find the modern system of conflict resolution comfortable, affordable or suited to their need.
4. Disputants are satisfied with their operations and view their outcomes as fair because these mechanisms give a chance to the parties to actively participate in handling their affairs

Elements necessary for Peacebuilding in Southeast Nigeria

In the obvious absence of an institutionalized regionwide peacebuilding programme for southeastern Nigeria, it becomes necessary to enunciate elements that would form the crux of any successful peacebuilding programme as follows:

- (a) Development of research/evidence based peacebuilding education curriculum;
- (b) Socio-economic and political equity;
- (c) Participatory and constitutional democracy;
- (d) Respect for human rights and rule of law;
- (e) Independent and responsible judiciary;
- (f) Demilitarization and promotion of pacific settlement of disputes;
- (g) Establishment of reconciliation and restorative agencies;
- (h) Good governance and responsive leadership;
- (i) Civic education and peace advocacy;
- (j) Effective separation of power;
- (k) Public accountability;
- (l) Prompt and adequate administration of justice;
- (m) Strengthening of NGOs and community based organizations (CBO); and
- (n) Freedom of speech, association and respect of media rights

CONCLUSION

Peacebuilding both as policy instrument and academic concept continues to gain significant momentum and currency. The gains that are recorded with every practical experience/implementation, whether at the global level through the United Nations, or at the regional, sub-regional, national or sub-national level through state and non-state actors will continue to spur on the noble ideals embedded in the golden concept of peacebuilding, while the failures or setbacks will take policy makers and peace scholars back to the drawing board to re-strategize on how to ensure a more ubiquitous applicability of the concept of peacebuilding.

This article turned its lens on the role of peacebuilding in southeast Nigeria, by critically interrogating the novel concept of peacebuilding, identifying the peculiar historical circumstances that characterise southeastern Nigeria leading to present day general feelings of deprivation and marginalization manifest in various secessionist movements and civil unrest. With seemingly near absence of any political will by the ruling hegemony to redeem the situation. The article therefore presents some of the best practices in peacebuilding as a way out of the woods.

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