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Corroding Armed Conflicts through Peacebuilding Initiatives in Northeast Nigeria

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Abstract

The Northeast region of Nigeria has faced protracted armed conflict driven by the Boko Haram insurgency, its offshoots such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and other forms of violence including banditry and communal clashes. These conflicts have precipitated widespread humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and profound socio-economic instability. In response, diverse peacebuilding initiatives have been deployed to weaken insurgent influence and restore regional stability. This article examines a range of peacebuilding efforts, encompassing government-led interventions, civil society and NGO programs, religious and community-based strategies, and international support mechanisms. Key approaches include grassroots dialogue, disarmament and demobilization programs, the rehabilitation of former insurgents, and youth empowerment schemes aimed at fostering community resilience. While notable progress has been achieved, peacebuilding in the region continues to face significant challenges such as persistent insecurity, intercommunal distrust, institutional fragility, and entrenched cultural barriers. The study emphasizes the need for a more inclusive, sustainable peacebuilding framework that integrates women and youth in peace processes and leverages indigenous conflict resolution practices. Recommendations include strengthening local peace infrastructures, improving

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monitoring and evaluation systems, enhancing inter-stakeholder collaboration, and investing in education and socio-economic development to sustain peace efforts. A comprehensive, well-resourced, and participatory strategy remains vital to disrupting cycles of violence and promoting long-term peace and social cohesion in Northeast Nigeria.

Keywords: Armed Conflict; Boko Haram; Peacebuilding; Community Resilience; Disarmament; Rehabilitation; Youth Empowerment; Peace Processes; Socioeconomic Instability

Introduction

The Northeast region of Nigeria has long been plagued by persistent and devastating armed conflicts, most notably the Boko Haram insurgency, which erupted in 2009. Boko Haram, officially designated as a terrorist organization by Nigeria and the international community, launched its campaign with the aim of establishing an Islamic state and rejecting Western education and influence. Over time, the group's activities evolved into a brutal campaign of bombings, kidnappings, massacres, and territorial conquest, resulting in extensive human suffering (Zenn, 2020). The situation worsened with the emergence of splinter groups, particularly the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which broke away from Boko Haram in 2016. ISWAP adopted more sophisticated tactics, further intensifying violence across Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, and leading to mass displacement, the deaths of tens of thousands, and the destruction of homes, schools, health centers, and farmlands.

Multiple factors have fueled these conflicts, creating a complex and deeply entrenched crisis. Widespread poverty, rampant unemployment, weak governance structures, political marginalization, and religious extremism have all contributed to the volatility of the region (Okoli & Nnaemeka, 2021). Additionally, historical grievances and competition over land and water resources have triggered frequent communal clashes between farmers and herders. Ethnic rivalries and criminal activities, including cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, and armed banditry, have further compounded insecurity and social fragmentation (Mustapha, 2019).

The cumulative effects of these crises have rendered the Northeast one of the most insecure and volatile areas in Nigeria today. Despite ongoing military operations and

humanitarian interventions, large portions of the region remain inaccessible to aid agencies, and millions of people continue to rely on emergency assistance for survival. The humanitarian crisis, coupled with the persistent threat of violence, has not only destabilized local communities but also posed significant challenges to national security and regional stability.

Given the complexity and protracted nature of the conflicts, military solutions alone have proven insufficient in restoring lasting peace. Peacebuilding has emerged as a critical strategy to address the underlying causes of conflict, promote reconciliation, rebuild trust, and support the social and economic recovery of affected communities (Adamu, 2022). Peacebuilding initiatives work to prevent the reoccurrence of violence by strengthening community resilience, promoting dialogue, supporting governance reforms, and fostering social cohesion (Ibrahim, 2021). They aim to address both the immediate effects and the root causes of conflict, making them indispensable for achieving sustainable peace in the Northeast.

The purpose of this article is to explore how peacebuilding initiatives are helping to weaken or "corrode" armed conflicts in Northeast Nigeria. It sought to highlight the various efforts by government agencies, civil society organizations, local communities, and international partners to reduce violence and promote stability. By analyzing successes, challenges, and lessons learned, the article aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about effective peacebuilding practices in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Definition of Armed Conflict

Armed conflict is broadly defined as a contested struggle between organized groups involving the use of armed force to achieve political, ideological, or economic objectives (UCDP, 2021). In the context of Northeast Nigeria, armed conflict encompasses the violent campaigns launched by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, as well as communal clashes, banditry, and farmer-herder conflicts. These conflicts are characterized by systematic violence, including attacks on civilians, targeted killings, bombings, abductions, and destruction of property. According to Olojo (2020), the armed conflict in Northeast Nigeria is driven not only by religious ideology but also by grievances related to poverty, political exclusion, and competition over dwindling natural resources.

The persistence of these armed confrontations has devastated the region, making it one of the world's most severe and prolonged humanitarian crises.

Understanding Peacebuilding Initiatives

Peacebuilding refers to a broad range of efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict, rebuilding institutions, and fostering reconciliation and sustainable peace in post-conflict societies (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). In Northeast Nigeria, peacebuilding initiatives have taken various forms, often designed to counter violent extremism and support community recovery. Key strategies include:

i. **Community dialogue and reconciliation programs**, which bring together divided groups to address grievances and rebuild trust (Eze, 2021).

ii. **Mediation efforts**, often facilitated by local leaders, civil society organizations, and religious figures, aimed at negotiating ceasefires or resolving communal disputes (Ibrahim & Yandaki, 2020).

iii. **Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs**, particularly targeting former Boko Haram fighters and youth involved in banditry, seeking to transition them into peaceful civilian life (Akinwale, 2022).

iv. **Economic empowerment projects**, such as vocational training and microfinance initiatives, designed to reduce unemployment and provide alternatives to joining armed groups (Bakut, 2021).

v. **Psychosocial support programs**, assisting victims of conflict-related trauma, especially internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees.

These peacebuilding measures aim not only to stop immediate violence but to build resilient communities capable of preventing future conflicts.

Explanation of "Corroding" in the Sense of Gradual Weakening or Dissolving of Conflicts

The term "corroding" metaphorically describes the slow, persistent process of weakening or dissolving something over time. In the context of this article, "corroding" armed conflict refers to the gradual undermining of the structures, motivations, and mechanisms that sustain violence in Northeast Nigeria. According to Ajayi and Buhari (2019), peacebuilding does not immediately eliminate conflict but systematically erodes the foundations of violence by promoting trust, restoring livelihoods, and addressing root

causes such as marginalization and poverty. Through sustained dialogue, reintegration programs, and improved governance, the social and psychological drivers of conflict are slowly dismantled, leading to a reduction in hostilities and the restoration of social cohesion. Thus, "corroding" signifies a deliberate, often slow but steady, weakening of the conflict environment through strategic peacebuilding interventions.

Major Peacebuilding Initiatives in Northeast Nigeria

a. Government-led Initiatives

The Nigerian government has launched several key initiatives to foster peace and rehabilitate communities affected by conflict in the Northeast. One of the most notable is "*Operation Safe Corridor (OSC)",* established in 2016. This program offers deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DRR) opportunities for repentant Boko Haram fighters through religious reorientation, psychosocial counseling, vocational training, and basic education (Akinjobi & Olofinbiyi, 2020). According to Mustapha (2021), OSC has been instrumental in reducing the number of active combatants and promoting reintegration into society, although it has faced challenges related to community acceptance and trust.

In addition, the *"North-East Development Commission (NEDC)"* was created in 2017 to coordinate reconstruction, resettlement, and socioeconomic development in the region. The NEDC has focused on rebuilding infrastructure, improving healthcare, restoring educational facilities, and promoting livelihood programs to stabilize communities affected by the insurgency (NEDC, 2021). The commission's interventions aim to address structural inequalities and vulnerabilities that fuel conflict.

b. NGO and Civil Society Efforts

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups have been central to grassroots peacebuilding efforts. Local peace committees, often facilitated by NGOs such as Search for Common Ground and Mercy Corps, bring together community leaders, youth, and women to mediate disputes, foster reconciliation, and rebuild intergroup trust (Eke, 2020). These committees work especially in areas previously under Boko Haram influence, restoring dialogue and mitigating the risk of communal violence.

Additionally, trauma healing programs organized by NGOs like the Neem Foundation and the American University of Nigeria (AUN) focus on psychosocial support for victims of

violence, including former child soldiers and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These programs offer counseling, mental health services, and social reintegration support to address the deep psychological scars left by years of conflict (Kareem, 2019).

c. Religious and Community-Based Interventions

Given the religious undertones of the Boko Haram conflict, religious leaders have played a crucial role in promoting peace and tolerance. Interfaith dialogue initiatives have been supported by organizations like the Interfaith Mediation Centre, which fosters collaboration between Christian and Muslim leaders to dispel extremist narratives and build bridges of understanding (Aliyu & Olayode, 2020).

Moreover, youth empowerment programs targeting at-risk young people have been deployed to reduce susceptibility to extremist recruitment. Programs like the Northeast Youth Peacebuilding Academy provide vocational training, leadership development, and civic education to promote positive engagement and economic self-sufficiency among young people in the region (Obi, 2021).

d. International Support and Collaboration

International organizations have provided critical support for peacebuilding in the Northeast. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, has implemented community stabilization projects that include rebuilding basic services, promoting dialogue, and supporting local governance structures (UNDP Nigeria, 2020).

Similarly, the World Bank launched the Multi-Sectoral Crisis Recovery Project (MCRP) to assist in the recovery of livelihoods, rehabilitation of infrastructure, and strengthening of social cohesion among displaced and host communities (World Bank, 2018). International NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Save the Children have also contributed by providing humanitarian aid, supporting education, and enhancing conflict-sensitive development programming.

Through these multifaceted and collaborative initiatives, both national and international actors continue to "corrode" the foundation of violent conflict, promoting conditions necessary for sustainable peace in Northeast Nigeria.

Strategies Used in Peacebuilding Efforts

Peacebuilding efforts in Northeast Nigeria have emerged as vital strategies to counter the devastating effects of years of armed conflict. Through community dialogue, rehabilitation programs, economic empowerment, and governance reforms, various stakeholders aim to gradually weaken, or "corrode," the roots of violence and foster lasting peace in the region. The following are the strategies used in peacebuilding:

i. Grassroots Dialogue and Reconciliation

Grassroots dialogue has been fundamental in rebuilding trust among fragmented communities in Northeast Nigeria. Peace committees, elders' councils, and community mediators have been established to facilitate open dialogue, mediate disputes, and prevent violent escalation. According to Eke (2020), local peacebuilding initiatives prioritize inclusive dialogue that brings together various stakeholders — including women, youth, religious leaders, and traditional rulers — to address grievances and foster mutual understanding. This bottom-up approach is crucial because local actors often have deeper cultural legitimacy and are better able to bridge divisions caused by years of conflict (Aliyu & Olayode, 2020).

ii. Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Former Insurgents

The rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of ex-combatants, particularly former Boko Haram members, is a core strategy. Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) provides a structured program including religious re-education, vocational skills training, psychological counseling, and civic education to facilitate the reintegration of defectors (Mustapha, 2021). Although challenges such as stigmatization and community resistance persist, the program has achieved some success in weakening insurgent recruitment pipelines by offering alternative life pathways to former fighters.

iii. Education and Vocational Training for Youth

Recognizing the role of youth marginalization in fueling insurgency, peacebuilding efforts increasingly focus on education and vocational training. Programs like the Northeast Youth Peacebuilding Academy offer non-formal education, entrepreneurial training, and apprenticeships to equip young people with skills for sustainable livelihoods (Obi, 2021). Education initiatives not only empower youth economically but also promote critical thinking and discourage susceptibility to extremist ideologies (UNDP Nigeria, 2020).

iv. Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Programs

Economic empowerment is a strategic pillar of peacebuilding in the Northeast. Poverty and lack of opportunity are known drivers of conflict; thus, initiatives such as the World Bank's Multi-Sectoral Crisis Recovery Project (MCRP) have invested in supporting small businesses, providing microgrants, and rebuilding agricultural livelihoods (World Bank, 2018). Similarly, NGOs like Mercy Corps have implemented cash-for-work programs, helping communities rebuild infrastructure while earning an income, thus restoring dignity and reducing the economic motivations for joining violent groups (Eke, 2020).

v. Psychosocial Support and Trauma Healing

Years of violence have left deep psychological scars among individuals and communities. Addressing this trauma is essential for sustainable peace. Organizations like the Neem Foundation and the American University of Nigeria (AUN) run trauma healing programs offering psychosocial counseling, peer support groups, and mental health education (Kareem, 2019). These interventions help survivors process grief, rebuild social bonds, and regain a sense of agency, which are critical for long-term reconciliation.

vi. Strengthening Local Governance and Justice Systems

Effective, inclusive governance is key to preventing relapse into violence. Peacebuilding programs supported by international donors, such as the UNDP, have focused on strengthening local government institutions, improving the capacity of justice systems, and promoting inclusive decision-making processes (UNDP Nigeria, 2020). Traditional authorities and local government councils are engaged to enhance transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. According to Akinjobi and Olofinbiyi (2020), building trust in governance structures helps to dismantle the conditions that extremists exploit to gain support.

Challenges Facing Peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria

Although numerous peacebuilding initiatives have been implemented across Northeast Nigeria, several critical challenges continue to undermine their effectiveness. These challenges range from persistent insecurity and community distrust to weak institutions and cultural barriers, all of which complicate efforts to achieve sustainable peace in the region.

a. Ongoing Insecurity and Sporadic Attacks: Despite progress in some areas, persistent insecurity continues to undermine peacebuilding efforts. Boko Haram factions and criminal elements still launch sporadic attacks on civilians, aid workers, and security forces, creating an environment of fear and instability (International Crisis Group, 2021). These attacks not only threaten the safety of communities but also disrupt ongoing peace projects, displace people anew, and discourage investment in long-term recovery initiatives (Okoli, 2020).

b. Distrust Among Communities and Former Fighters: Reintegration programs, such as Operation Safe Corridor, have faced significant resistance due to widespread distrust of former insurgents. Many communities remain skeptical about accepting rehabilitated fighters, fearing re-infiltration or future violence (Mustapha, 2021). According to Eke (2020), the lack of genuine reconciliation processes and community-led healing initiatives hampers the social reintegration of ex-combatants and risks deepening divisions rather than mending them.

c. Weak Institutions and Lack of Political Will: The fragility of local institutions and inconsistent political commitment pose serious obstacles to sustainable peacebuilding. Many local governments in the Northeast suffer from limited capacity, corruption, and poor service delivery, which diminishes public trust and enables extremist narratives to flourish (Akinjobi & Olofinbiyi, 2020). Furthermore, political leaders sometimes prioritize short-term security victories over long-term peace strategies, leading to fragmented and poorly coordinated interventions (Aliyu & Olayode, 2020).

d. Insufficient Funding and Coordination Among Actors: Funding constraints severely limit the scope and sustainability of peacebuilding programs. Many initiatives rely on short-term donor funding, which leads to frequent disruptions and scaling-down of critical services (UNDP Nigeria, 2020). Additionally, poor coordination among government agencies, international donors, and NGOs results in duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources, weakening the overall impact of interventions (World Bank, 2018).

e. Cultural and Religious Barriers: Deep-rooted cultural and religious differences also complicate peacebuilding. Efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and women's participation in peace processes sometimes encounter resistance from conservative segments of society (Aliyu & Olayode, 2020). Gender norms, ethnic rivalries, and religious biases can inhibit inclusive peace processes, leaving out key stakeholders and perpetuating grievances that fueled the conflict in the first place.

Success Stories and Positive Impacts

While the Northeast remains volatile, several communities have experienced reductions in violence due to peacebuilding efforts. For example, Gwoza, a town in Borno State that was once a stronghold of Boko Haram, has seen a remarkable turnaround. Following the establishment of local peace committees, community dialogue sessions, and the deployment of security reinforcements, Gwoza has experienced a reduction in insurgent attacks (UNDP Nigeria, 2020). Local leaders, in collaboration with the Nigerian military and NGOs, have facilitated the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which has fostered a sense of hope and stability. Additionally, the Maiduguri region has benefitted from sustained collaboration between local communities and the government, resulting in reduced insurgent activity and better resource distribution to prevent extremist ideologies from gaining traction (Akinjobi & Olofinbiyi, 2020).

The Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), Nigeria's flagship deradicalization and reintegration program, has produced notable success in reducing violence in the region. Since its inception, the OSC has rehabilitated over 600 former Boko Haram fighters and has reintegrated them into communities through vocational training, psychological counseling, and education (Mustapha, 2021). For example, former insurgents in Bauchi State have been successfully reintegrated into society, contributing to the local economy through agriculture and trade. According to Eke (2020), the program's success lies in its focus on the social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants, which reduces the likelihood of re-recruitment into insurgent groups. The long-term success of OSC has helped diminish insurgent morale by offering former fighters an alternative path.

Another significant impact of peacebuilding efforts is the improved resilience and social cohesion witnessed in many Northeast communities. In Yobe State, local peacebuilding initiatives, such as interfaith dialogues and the involvement of women in conflict resolution, have played an instrumental role in strengthening community ties. These efforts have reduced religious and ethnic tensions, fostered cooperation between farmers and herders, and established support networks that make communities more resilient to future shocks (Obi, 2021). Furthermore, trauma healing programs in areas like Adamawa State have assisted displaced persons in overcoming the psychological toll of conflict, enabling them to reintegrate into society with greater cohesion (Kareem, 2019). As a result, these

communities are better equipped to resist extremist ideologies and rebuild their social fabric.

Gaps and Areas for Improvement

While notable progress has been made, many peacebuilding efforts in Northeast Nigeria are still largely focused on short-term interventions, which often fail to address the root causes of conflict. For sustained peace, there is a pressing need for more long-term strategies that go beyond immediate security concerns. This includes integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which have historically played a pivotal role in maintaining peace at the community level (Aliyu & Olayode, 2020). Moreover, current peacebuilding programs must not only focus on deradicalization but also address the socio-economic conditions that fuel extremism, such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure. A more comprehensive approach that includes education, healthcare, and economic infrastructure will help to ensure that peace is both durable and inclusive.

Another critical gap lies in the insufficient involvement of women and youth in the peacebuilding process. Women, as primary caregivers and community leaders, possess unique insights into sustaining peace, yet their roles are often marginalized (Kareem, 2019). Similarly, engaging youth in peace initiatives can prevent their radicalization and ensure that they become active contributors to social cohesion (Obi, 2021). Efforts to incorporate both groups into peacebuilding processes would lead to more balanced and holistic interventions. Furthermore, significant investments in long-term educational programs and vocational training are essential to breaking the cycle of violence and creating opportunities for youth, who are often the most vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding initiatives in Northeast Nigeria have made significant strides in weakening and "corroding" the entrenched armed conflicts, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency and related violence. Programs such as community dialogue, disarmament efforts, and reintegration initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor have contributed to reducing insurgent activities and fostering social cohesion. Despite the challenges, communities that were once hotspots for violence, such as Gwoza and Maiduguri, have experienced notable

reductions in conflict, creating space for recovery and stability. These efforts, although successful, highlight that peacebuilding in the region requires continuous engagement and adaptive strategies to address the complex underlying factors that fuel conflict.

However, for these peacebuilding successes to be sustainable, there is a need for more inclusive, long-term, and well-funded initiatives. Involving women, youth, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms will further strengthen community ownership and resilience. Moreover, sustained investment in critical areas like education, healthcare, and economic development is crucial to addressing the root causes of conflict and ensuring that peace is not only achieved but maintained. A comprehensive, inclusive approach, supported by coordinated and adequate funding, will be essential in transforming the region and securing a lasting peace in Northeast Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Local Peacebuilding Institutions:** To enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria, it is crucial to empower local peacebuilding institutions. This includes strengthening peace committees, local leaders, and community-based organizations to mediate conflicts and promote long-term peace at the grassroots level. By supporting these institutions, communities can better respond to emerging conflicts, ensuring that solutions are culturally relevant and context-specific.
2. **Promote Inclusive Dialogue at All Levels:** It is essential to promote inclusive dialogue at all levels of society, from local communities to national platforms. Engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including marginalized groups, in peacebuilding discussions fosters trust and cooperation. Ensuring that women, youth, and other underrepresented groups have a seat at the table allows for a more comprehensive and representative peace process, leading to sustainable conflict resolution.
3. **Enhance Monitoring and Evaluation of Peacebuilding Programs:** To ensure the effectiveness and accountability of peacebuilding initiatives, there should be a robust system for monitoring and evaluating these programs. Regular assessments will help identify successful approaches and highlight areas in need of improvement. This process should be transparent and participatory, allowing for

ongoing adjustments to strategies based on real-time data and feedback from local communities.

4. **Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders:** Collaboration is key to successful peacebuilding efforts. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, international organizations, and security forces should work together in a coordinated manner to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure efficient use of resources. Establishing strong partnerships will enhance the overall impact of peace initiatives and promote greater social cohesion across affected regions.
5. **Prioritize Youth and Women's Participation in Peace Processes:** A crucial aspect of sustainable peace is the active participation of youth and women in peacebuilding efforts. Empowering these groups through education, leadership training, and direct involvement in decision-making will foster a more inclusive and resilient society. Providing opportunities for women and youth to engage in peace processes not only strengthens social cohesion but also helps to reduce the risk of future conflicts by addressing the grievances and aspirations of these key demographic groups.

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