

Community-Based Participation in Mitigating Conflicts for Sustainable Peace in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study is an assessment to ascertain community-based participation in mitigating conflicts for sustainable peace in Rivers State. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive research design was adopted. The sample size for this study was 385, 517 and 235 respectively making a total of 1137 respondents in the three senatorial districts of Rivers State. A researcher-made questionnaire titled ‘‘Community Based Participation in Mitigating Conflict for Sustainable Peace Assessment Instrument (CPIMCSAI) was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-retest method, the reliability co-efficient obtained was 0.74. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. From the analysis, the study revealed among others the extent of community-based participation in conflict prevention for sustainable peace is through the provision of early warning signs of conflicts, resolution of issue of violence and dialogue as a means of enhancing sustainable peace. It also highlighted some of the challenges in the process. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that there should be adequate community-based participation in mediation processes and prevention of conflicts. This will enhance capacity for sustainable peace building in most areas of the state.

Keywords: Community Participation, Mitigation, Conflict, Sustainable, Peace,

Introduction

The issue of sustainable peace according to Echezu and Ugwu (2022), is a major concern and focus in most stakeholders’ discourses. This concern is based on the fact that meaningful development can hardly thrive in the absence of lasting peace. By means of this reason, sustainable peace is seen as an important ingredient in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Accordingly, to attain sustainable peace needs adequate community-based participation in preventing conflicts. Conflict prevention as perceived by most researchers is a

major agenda of the United Nations (UN) and it is a measure with the express intent of anticipating conflicts or to forestall the possibility of conflicts into a generalised and uncontrolled violence among the people, and such action comprises a host of activities ranging from confidence–building, reconciliation, fact finding missions to preventive diplomacy, mediation, negotiation and facilitation (Mwanasali,2012). Nwachukwu (2009) stated that conflict prevention must also take the form of mass re-orientation, education and prompt interventionist modalities. Odote and Nzomo (2019) explained the concept as a process requiring the identification of both structural and proximate causes of conflict, as well as the measure in place to avert the causes and outbreak of violent conflicts. It can also be made possible by taking structural or long-term steps that enables early warning analysis and operational procedures to prevent escalation. Besides, community-based participation is the very ideal option for preventing conflicts at grass roots level. Accordingly, Ayuk, et.al (2012) offered two methods of preventing, managing and transforming violent conflicts. These include, the proactive method, which is aimed at the prevention of the occurrence of violent conflicts in the first place. This is safeguarded by the provision of good leadership, the establishment of strong-willed political platforms. The platforms readily serving to instill in the membership virtues of good political activism, knowing that the converse shall attract serious consequences, establishment of inter-party collaborations, where both documented and undocumented community-based trust and confidence building are fostered to create sense of belonging and nurture acceptable responsibilities for lasting peace. This understanding, enables the generation of interventionist programmes that assist in reducing violence among communities. In tandem with Olaita (2017), conflict prevention enables lasting peace, because of the measures to prevent the recurrence of violence, by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institutional building, and political as well as economic transformations. Olaita, further noted that the process supports post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. The essential goals of peace building initiatives are to:

1. create an atmosphere that is caring and self-sustaining for harmony;
2. resolve the issues of conflicts among warring parties;
3. avert the reoccurrence of conflict or war among people;
4. allow the civil society as an essential institution to participate in the maintenance of long-lasting peace;
5. institutionalize the rule of law and the judiciary;
6. adequately discourse underlying issues that can lead to the escalation of conflicts.

Although, these goals may be considered as bane to successful process of reducing violence and preventing conflict, but it could serve the essence of limiting potential threats to sustainable peace among people. Additionally, conflict prevention can only be fully activated when there is inclusive and functional peace building process which is deeply codified in the universal human rights and national policies. This is because sustainable peace is not possible without the presence of social justice. For this reason, atmosphere of peace is necessary for stable polity and desired climate for sustainable national development (Omada & Michael, 2015). Similarly, Olaita (2017) again added that the United Nations have been at the forefront of expanding international capacity to curbing violent conflicts through peacebuilding efforts. Olaita further identified some of the useful structures to be considered for conflict reduction as follows:

1. The use of well-seasoned experts who can comfortably work with other stakeholders to possibly plan the way out of conflicts through workshops and seminars processes. The process should foster integrity and transparency among the stakeholders in addressing root causes of conflict.
2. It should engender a true spirit of sustainable reconciliation for peaceful co-existence and the use of robust approaches to relate better with the affected citizens.
3. The process must boost the presence and active participation of non-state actors like the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the media. The structure will make possible some of the unique activities that are essential in either to resolve, prevent or manage conflicts.
4. The entrenchment of civic education and strong advocacy for peace at all levels of the school curriculum.
5. The encouragement of real separation of power as observed right from colonial days to forestall the causes of crises that are rooted in leadership, greed, inequity, corruption, injustice, among other problems.

As a result, Browne (2014) added that the usefulness of the structures in peace building will assist in the provisions of early warning signals of worsening peace and security situations at the grass root, providing psychological and material supports to victims of violent conflicts in the State. Hanachor and Echezue (2021) demonstrably observed evidence based on the available literature that community-based participation adequately facilitates peace building process. Thus, community-based peace building process cannot be over emphasised. This is because of the commitment to preaching peace among adherence, providing humanitarian supports to victims,

mediate between parties in conflicts and possibly providing warning signals about the stages of conflict to the state agencies.

However, to ensure community-based participation for sustainable peace is not without constraints. Therefore, it is obvious that the process is faced with many challenges which intends to impede the overall goals of sustainable peace in the society. Thus, Patrick in Echezue (2023) observed these challenges as the reason for poor community-based performance in resolving underlining conflict. This observation critically expresses the upshot of doubt or distrust using community-based participation as intermediaries or catalyst for resolving or preventing conflict. Besides, Hanachor and Wordu (2021) stated that the challenges are due to negative perception, absence of mutual conviction and confidence, protection of trouble makers by the state actors, lack of visionary schemes and poor funding to name but a few. Accordingly, Ugwu (2015) identified some of the fundamental issues that can obstruct community-based participation as follows:

1. Financial Problem as one of the most challenges. This is because most of community rely mainly on the contributions of their members which may be too little to achieve set goals. In some circumstances, there are evidences of corrupt practices that compromise intentions.
2. Primitive process of managing scarce resources that gives opportunities for mismanagement of funds, compromise of accountability that eventually ensue conflicts of interest and ruin intension of the organisations.
3. Lack of dedicated leadership with requisite developmental and leadership skills is an impediment and major reason for the observed minimal contribution to development.
4. The grassroots democracy is primitive, highly sentimental and reason why an executive member may serve during many administrations, inspiring arrogance, thwarting of common goals into personal objectives.
5. The much-emphasized economic breakthrough which has resulted in urban drift where the spirit of volunteerism seems to be fading away with far reaching implications in decision making process.

Another side of this problem is also the motive for participation. While some community participation is not unconnected with source of personal economic gains, others may genuinely participate to complement efforts of the state in fostering peaceful conditions. It is also observed that the manner through which most community-based participations are structured tend to

undermine public trust. On the other hand, the lack of proper coordination and consultation within the line of operations of distinguished leadership, also compound the issues of experience and technical know-how in handling conflict issues (Echezue, 2023). Kang'ethe (2010) observed that the lack of co-operation from the state poses a serious challenge to the efficiency of community-based participation. In many countries especially where, democratic dispensation has not taken roots, the state often perceived anything community-based participation as opposition and then use bureaucratic styles to frustrate their formation. The scenarios are common in most African countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa and Botswana among others, this is because the government provide a reasonable amount of financial support for community-based participations. Unpublished evidence indicates that agencies such as FAMSA in East London are also faced with similar threats since 2012 (Kang'ethe & Manomano, 2014 and Barnard, 2012).

Thus, the concern of this study is to assess community-based participation in mitigating conflicts for sustainable peace in Rivers State. This study is delimited to two (2) Local Government Areas in each of the three (3) senatorial districts in Rivers State. The local government areas are: Emohua and Obio/Akpor in Rivers East Senatorial District, Abua-Odual, and Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni in Rivers West and Eleme and Andoni in Rivers South of the state.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do community-based participation assist in conflict prevention for sustainable peace in Rivers State?
2. What are the community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace in Rivers State?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of this study comprised all residents in the three senatorial districts of Rivers State. Two local government areas each were purposively selected from the Senatorial Districts. The local government areas are: Emohua and Obio/Akpor in Rivers East Senatorial District, Abua-Odual, and Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni in Rivers West and Eleme and Andoni in Rivers South of the state. The sample size for this study was 385, 517 and 235 respectively making a total of 1137 respondents. A researcher-made questionnaire titled 'Community Based Participation in Mitigating Conflict for Sustainable Peace Assessment Instrument (CPIMCSAI) was used for data collection. The study showed a high reliability coefficient of 0.74. A total of one thousand three hundred and fifty-nine (1,359) copies of the

questionnaire were administered to the respondents among which 194 of them were not returned while 28 were not properly filled but only 1137 copies of the questionnaire which represent 84% were used for the analysis of this study. The study used the simple percentage to analysed the demographic data of respondents while the weighted mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The benchmark of 2.50 derived through the addition of the weight and dividing by 4 was used in taking decisions.

Results

The results of the study are presented as follows.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age, Sex, Educational qualification and categories

Variables	Respondent	F	%
Age	18-29 years	118	10
	30-40 years	271	24
	41-50 years	466	41
	51 years and above	285	25
Sex	Male	772	68.
	Female	368	32
Educational Level	No formal education	14	1
	Primary education	126	11
	Secondary education	101	9
	Tertiary education	899	79
Categories of Respondents			
	Leaders	315	27
	Members	825	72

Table 1 shows that 118(10 %) of the total respondents are between the age range of 18-29 years, 271 (24 %) are between the age range of 30-40 years, 466 (41%) are between the age range of 41-50 years, while 285 representing 25 % of the total respondents are 51 years and above. Majority of the respondents had tertiary education; this is indicated in the above table with 899 (79 %) where 14 respondents representing 1% of the respondents are without formal education. 126 representing 11% of them attended primary school while 101 of respondents representing 9 % are secondary school leavers. The table also showed that 772 respondents representing 68 % are males, while females are 368 representing 32 % of the entire respondents. The table further indicated the categories of respondents in the areas as thus, leaders 315 representing 27 % of the total respondents, 72 % of the respondents which formed a total number of 825 are members of one community or the other.

Research Question 1: To what extent do community-based participation assist in conflict prevention for sustainable peace in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean scores on community-based participation in conflict prevention for sustainable peace

S/N	Items	Rivers East N =385		Rivers West N=517		Rivers South N=235		Grand Mean (x)	Decision
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1	Provide early warning signs to prevent escalation of conflicts in the communities	2.64	1.02	2.87	.83	3.24	.83	2.92	High Extent
2	Ensure responsible resolution of issue of violence in the community	3.0	.99	3.79	.97	3.50	.89	3.43	High extent
3	Encourage process of dialogue as a means of enhancing sustainable peace	3.50	.89	2.50	.90	3.10	.99	3.03	High Extent
4	Building capacity to deal with divergent interests of people in order not to resort to violence	2.86	.93	1.87	.89	2.10	.78	1.94	Very low extent
5	Encourage togetherness for a common united purpose among members of the community	2.52	.75	2.55	.74	3.79	.97	2.95	High Extent

The result of the analysed data in table 2 indicates the mean responses on extent community-based participation in conflict prevention for sustainable peace in Rivers State. Respondents in the study area responded with high extent on the items raised in 1 and 2 that is, the extent that community-based participation has provided early warning signs to prevent escalation of conflicts in the community (with mean scores 2.64 and SD=1.02, 2.87 and .83, 3.24 and .83 respectively), and responsible resolution of issue of violence in the community (Mean scores=3.0 and SD=.99, 3.79 and .97, 3.50 and .89 respectively) with the highest grand mean scores of 2.92 and 3.43. Nevertheless, on item 3 respondents in the study area agreed that the extent to which community-based participation has encouraged the process of dialogue as a means of enhancing sustainable peace with smean scores of 3.50 and SD=.89, 2.50 and .90, and 3.10 and .99 while in item 4 has mean score =2.86 and SD=.93, 1.87 and .89, and 2.10 and .78 respectively with grand mean of 1.94. Item 5 indicates a high extent of involvement of community-based participation in the study area with mean score=2.52 and SD=.75, 2.55 and .74, and 3.79 and .97 respectively with grand mean score of 2.95.

Research Question 2: What are the community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean scores on community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace.

S/N	Items	Rivers East N =385		Rivers West N=517		Rivers South N=235		Grand Mean (x)	Decision
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1	Endemic evidences of corrupt practices that compromises good intention.	3.47	.50	3.35	.48	3.76	.42	3.53	Agree
2	Inadequate leadership experiences and skills to pilot the affairs in the process.	2.83	.79	2.79	.77	2.95	.86	2.86	Agree
3	Mutual distrust and lack of cooperation as a result of different objectives and diversities of the membership.	2.94	.75	2.87	.74	3.16	.63	2.99	Agree
4	Insecurity and violent conflicts that often disrupt routine activities in the community.	3.09	.58	3.01	.55	3.32	.52	3.14	Agree
5	Improper operational strategies, actions and planning processes of the activities.	3.04	.84	2.90	.87	3.47	.50	3.14	Agree

The result of the analysed data in table 3 indicates the mean responses on the community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace in Rivers State. Respondents responded positively on the all items raised. Item 1, that is, evidence of corrupt practices that compromise good intentions attracted the highest mean score of 3.53. with the range of grand mean scores from 2.82 to 3.53, the results reveal corrupt practices that compromise good intentions, inexperience leadership, mutual distrust as a result of different objectives of the membership, insecurity and improper operational strategies among others as the challenges in community-based participation for sustainable peace in Rivers State.

Discussion of findings

Community-Based Participation in Conflict Prevention for Sustainable Peace

In terms of community-based participation in conflict prevention for sustainable peace in Rivers State, the result of findings revealed that community-based participation has a positive impact to achieving the target. Respondents noted that community-based participation in conflict prevention enables the provision of early warning signs to prevent escalation of conflicts, responsible resolution of issue of violence and the process of dialogue as a means of enhancing

sustainable peace. The findings further revealed community-based participation as the capacity to deal with divergent interests of people in order not to resort to violence and to encourage togetherness for a common united purpose among members of the community. Understanding the importance of collaboration with the community in preventing conflict will assist in the achievement of this target in Rivers state. The result of findings is in agreement with Browne (2014) which explained the vital role of community participation in preventing conflict and promoting peace building process. The author observed that people at the grass root help in providing early warning signals for worsening peace and security situations, mediate between warring parties and offer psychological supports to victims among other services. Hanachor and Echezue (2021) stated that there is demonstrable evidence based on the available literature that community-based participation adequately contributes to peace building process. Accordingly, this is observable in the commitment of some community groups through the preaching of peace among their members, providing humanitarian supports to victims, mediating between parties in conflicts and possibly providing cautioning signals about issues of conflicts to the state actors. Besides, community-based participation is the ideal option for conflict preventions among people because it offers methods of preventing, managing and how to transform violent conflicts. These include, the proactive method, which is aimed at the prevention of the occurrence of violent conflicts in the first place. This is ensured by the provision of good leadership, the establishment of strong willed political platforms that is ready to instill in its membership the virtues of good political activism, knowing that the converse shall attract serious consequences, establishment of inter-party collaborations, where both documented and undocumented community-based trust and confidence building which is capable of fostering sense of belonging, good communication, adequate security and responsible corporate organisations are nurtured (Ayuk et. al, 2012). The implication of the findings is a clear indication that community-based participation is capable of assisting the state to reduce incidences of conflicts among various communities. It is therefore very imperative that the state should effectively partner with the various community-based groups to achieve sustainable peace in the study area.

Community-Based Challenges in Mitigating Conflict for Sustainable Peace.

Result of the findings on the community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace in Rivers State indicated several areas of challenges to that effect. Respondents revealed the challenges as endemic evidences of corrupt practices that compromises good intention of the group, inadequate leadership experiences and skills to pilot the affairs of the idea of

community-based participation, mutual distrust and lack of cooperation as a result of different objectives and diversities of the people. The findings further identified these challenges as insecurity, violent conflicts which often disrupt routine activities, improper operational strategies, actions and planning processes of that negate the goal of participation. The findings corroborated with the study of Echezue (2023) that the past performance of community-based participation was usually adjudged as poor, or as having produced very little to solve peace and conflicts problems because of the presence of strong scepticism, cynicism and criticism of the people. Ugwu (2015) identified some of the problems that are hindering the complementary roles of community in achieving sustainable peace in the study area as financial problem, lack of dedicated leadership and transparent system, lack of strategic planning resulting to dearth of volunteerism among others. The findings clearly indicated community-based challenges in mitigating conflict for sustainable peace. Therefore, since the overall goal of community-based participation is to assist the state in sustainable peace building in order to attract respective development, there is need to urgently address the various daunting problems confronting community-based participation in peace process.

Conclusion.

Based on the findings of this study, the demographics of the respondents indicates that the participants have a dependable wealth of experience to sustainable peace building and ability to address conflicts in their respective communities. The extent to which community-based participation assist in conflict prevention for sustainable peace, was exceedingly indicated as the process to providing early warning and conflict resolutions among others. Some of the challenges confronting the process were established in the course of the study, so as to be address the issues of sustainable peace in Rivers State.

Recommendations.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are therefore made:

1. Capacity for community-based participation in mediation and conflict prevention processes should be enhanced for sustainable peace building in the state.
2. Government should collaborate effectively with respective stakeholders to address community-based challenges in mitigating conflicts in the state.

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