

Policyweekly

Community and Traditional Institutions' Engagement in Peace Programming:

Learning from North-East Nigeria



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Policy Recommendations

- 1 The interventions for restoring order and peacebuilding in the North-East should include a communication intervention programme.
- 2 In integrating the people, the trusted institutions in which they relate and channels through which they communicate are used to reach the widest possible number of persons.
- 3 Post-conflict reintegration of groups that had supported the security institutions in their anti-terror and anti-insurgency campaigns requires policy interest and action, such as legitimate exit strategies.
- 4 A systematic participatory design that requires special expertise and skill, the Federal Government should consider engaging a firm of experts to design an engagement framework.

Introduction

Insurgency, banditry, and related conflicts in North-East Nigeria have led to the loss of lives, population displacement and social stress. The United Nations Development Program ([UNDP](#)) [estimates the number of deaths directly related to the conflicts to be 350,000, while 314,000 people died from indirect causes](#). This consequence of the conflict has attracted several local and international interventions for peace and recovery. For instance, the [Early Recovery Programme for the North-East](#) in the three states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, funded by the government of Norway, is being implemented by the UNDP. Also, the Multi-Sectoral Crisis Recovery Project of the International Development Association is being implemented in the region. These and several other international interventions add to the work of the North-East Development Commission (NEDC), a Federal Government intervention institution for rebuilding the North-East and different state government recovery programmes in the affected states. The

interventions are, in good part, peacebuilding initiatives to support security efforts in the region.

In the light of the multiple peace efforts, a study that explored the perspectives of the affected communities on the peacebuilding interventions in the North-East by the [Kukah Centre](#) reported some of their core findings could be grounded on the role and importance of traditional institutions in peace programming. A few of the findings include a feeling of exclusion in decision-making from local and international responses to the insurgency. Thus, their fears, needs and concerns are not properly considered. Hence the programming fails to reach the needs of the most vulnerable. Secondly, the findings also see the programme of reintegration of ex-combatants as an imposed one which could lead to reprisals. Thirdly, the interventions fail to address the tensions created by the insurgency among different cultural communities like ethnic and religious communities, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities; returning IDPs and members of their communities who did not flee. Fourthly, mistrust continues to exist between communities and security actors. Among several study findings, the above four have implications for community engagement in designing a lasting peace in the North-East.

These findings suggest that existing peace programming does not involve sufficient communication to properly mainstream voices and needs from below. By not properly engaging the community and traditional institutions that would support the internalisation of peace programming objectives, the outcome is unlikely to be sustainable. Hence, this edition of the Nextier SPD Policy Weekly considers the values of engaging community and traditional institutions and harnessing the outcome of the engagement for sustainable peace in North-West and Central Nigeria, using the North-East as the case study.

Community and Traditional Institutions as the Missing Voices in North-East Peacebuilding Designs

Federal and state governments collaborate with international donors to strengthen security and rebuild the North East. This, according to the [World Bank](#), warrants reuniting families, rebuilding livelihoods and repairing badly damaged infrastructure. While providing security from the attacks of terrorists and bandits remains a major challenge to achieving these goals, there is a greater issue associated with the designs of existing peacebuilding programmes. They are predominantly top-down designs of governments, multilateral institutions and donors. For instance, the government's de-radicalisation programme called [Operation Safe Corridor](#), with locations in Gombe for ex-male terrorists and in Borno for repentant female terrorists, faces stiff opposition from victims and those who lost family members to terror attacks, including widows of slain soldiers. There is also the problem of reintegrating

civilian groups that rose in defence of their communities against insurgency, especially the Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF). It does not seem that the government has any lasting plan for this group that has learned how to use arms and engaged in combats but has no promise of a sustainable source of livelihood in a post-conflict order. While communities have accepted the CJTF due to their valuable roles in a conflict order, what happens to task force members and how they can live with the communities in the future is still unclear. This is the same with multiple vigilante groups across the North-Central and North-West regions of the country.

In rebuilding livelihoods, the interventions are beset with the lack of statistics and information about the location of vulnerable and needy individuals. Donors are likely to focus on displaced persons in IDP camps and other easy to access areas. Yet, some victims could not have access to both the formal and informal IDP camps. Such persons are stuck in distant and difficult to reach locations and often suffer more vulnerabilities than those in IDP camps. It takes only community and traditional channels that understand the geography of the communities to identify these groups. Existing programming neglects this group because of inadequate community input. There are many displaced and vulnerable persons across the North-Central and North-West whose situations have not been given the needed attention due to the politicisation of such conflicts such as the Farmers-Herders conflict.

Further, a dimension of the conflict to which the peacebuilding efforts have not given adequate attention is the intense division and distrusts that the insurgency has occasioned in the North-East. For instance, Christian and Muslim groups in the [Michika](#) local government area of Adamawa State trade blame each other for the cause of the insurgency. This feud between the two groups shows that the local government officials have assigned separate market days at the community's largest market, called Michika Central Market, to prevent conflict. The necessary cross-cultural dialogue among ethnic, religious and other groups is yet to be integrated into peace programming. The point is that the interventions and the institutions through which they are carried out do not take adequate information from the subjects of the intervention. Overall, communication interventions for engaging with communities and traditional institutions are too limited or non-existent. It poses a danger to the sustainability of the results of the current efforts. The same can be seen in states like Kaduna and Plateau, where such programmes still fail to build a peaceful society but instead maintain an existing divide among the person rather than break it down.

Getting it Right with Communication Intervention

Sustainable programming for peace should necessarily integrate a significant communication

component which requires a communication-based assessment jointly done by donors and communities. Donors ought to find out the most trusted institutions of the people and their communication channels. The idea is to support these institutions and channels to make the objectives of the peace interventions flow seamlessly from systems that the people are familiar with. For instance, communities have traditional institutions such as women, religious, youth groups, traditional stools etc., that are known to easily mobilise the various groups. It is by integrating communication intervention and working with and through these groups that community problems and needs are articulated, and opportunities for solving them explored; and most importantly, solutions that would command the buy-in of the communities would be jointly explored and adopted.

Based on the preceding, the following steps are suggested for engaging with communities and traditional institutions for the restoration of order and peacebuilding in the North-East:

1. The interventions for restoring order and peacebuilding in the North-East should include a communication intervention programme. Such an intervention programme would bring the people on board at the early phase of defining the problem, assessing the need to solve it, exploring opportunities and threats, and identifying the best solution-set that can potentially achieve substantial support from the people.
2. In integrating the people, the trusted institutions in which they relate and channels through which they communicate are used to reach the widest possible number of persons. Usually, in communication intervention, the people are empowered with skills to support and drive change programmes in their communities. Therefore, networks of information sharing for security are easily set up while the nature of needs, people in need and their locations are better tracked using the local population that has relevant information on them. For this purpose, traditional institutions such as the authority structure, women's groups, and youth groups are some of the possible contexts of community engagement.
3. Post-conflict reintegration of groups that had supported the security institutions in their anti-terror and anti-insurgency campaigns and continue to support security in the North-East

such as the CJTF, require policy interest and action such as legitimate exit strategies.

4. For communication intervention, a systematic participatory design that requires special expertise and skill, the Federal Government should consider engaging a firm of experts to design a framework of engagement to support the ongoing peacebuilding intervention of the various stakeholders in the North-East.

Conclusion

The ravages of conflict in the North-East have attracted several local and international interventions for peace and rebuilding efforts. The intervening stakeholders include the federal and state governments of the affected states, multilateral institutions, and international and local Non-Governmental Organisations. They have high worth, well-intentioned programmes but are implemented in a top-down manner. This type of programme design bears the gap of not considering the local nuances of problems, the full dimensions of the prevailing issues and the ability to fully capture the nature of vulnerabilities and persons affected. Besides, it is implemented through institutions with which the local people are not very familiar and may not seamlessly comply with their interventions. Therefore, a communication intervention programme that builds on a bottom-up model for community and traditional institutions engagement is suggested for a sustainable peace intervention in the North-East.

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Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

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Wednesday, 25 May 2022
@6:00 pm – 7:45 pm

Thought Pyramid Art Centre,
18 Libreville Crescent, Wuse II,
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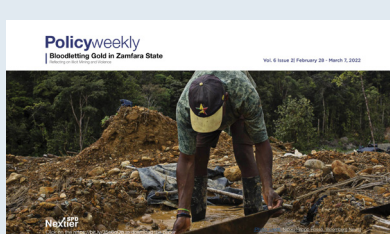
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