

**ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF PEACE COMMITTEE ON
THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND OUTCOMES OF
ACD'S PEACEBUILDING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN
KEGBARA DERE AND BARANYOWA DERE COMMUNITIES,
GOKANA LGA, RIVERS STATE**

By

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Abstract

The role of local peace committees in shaping effective peace building communication strategies remains underexplored, particularly in conflict-prone African communities, such as Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere in Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, where resource-based tensions exacerbate inter-communal conflicts. This study examines how the peace committee influences the design, implementation, and outcomes of the Accord for Community Development's (ACD) peace building communication strategy. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative data from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis with quantitative data from structured questionnaires and interview guide administered to 400 respondents and 30 participants. The methodology, grounded in Creswell's mixed-methods framework, ensures a holistic understanding of community dynamics through triangulation and robust validity checks, including inter-rater reliability and Cronbach's Alpha testing. Findings reveal that the peace committee enhances ACD's strategy by leveraging trusted local leaders, indigenous

communication channels, and social networks, achieving a mean agreement score of 3.97 for effective word-of-mouth dissemination. However, challenges such as historical grievances and external political pressures (mean score 3.56) hinder open dialogue. These findings align with the study's objectives to identify opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for sustainable peace building communication. Recommendations include prioritising youth and women's inclusion in peace committees (mean score of 4.30), fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations (mean score of 4.25), and integrating culturally resonant tools like songs and drama (mean score of 3.86) to enhance engagement. The study uniquely contributes to peace building scholarship by providing empirical evidence of how local peace committees shape context-specific communication strategies in resource-conflict settings, offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners to strengthen grassroots peace processes in the Niger Delta and similar contexts.

Keywords: Peace Committee, Communication Strategy, Peace building, Community Engagement and Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

Globally, the conceptualisation of peacebuilding communication strategies has undergone substantial evolution, particularly in the context of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Contemporary scholarship emphasises that effective peacebuilding transcends mere cessation of hostilities to encompass comprehensive approaches that address structural inequalities and promote sustainable peace. According to Lederach (2015), sustainable peacebuilding requires transformation of relationships and social structures that perpetuate conflict, moving beyond traditional cease-fire approaches to address root causes of violence (p. 83). Furthermore, research by Mac Ginty and Richmond (2016) demonstrates that modern peacebuilding paradigms increasingly recognise the critical role of local actors and indigenous mechanisms in fostering enduring peace, challenging traditional top-down approaches that have historically dominated international interventions. Subsequently, the integration of peace committees within peacebuilding frameworks has emerged as a globally recognised best practice, with empirical evidence suggesting their effectiveness in mediating local conflicts and facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties. Studies by Autesserre (2021) reveal that community-driven peacebuilding initiatives

demonstrate significantly higher success rates when communication strategies are culturally embedded and participatory in nature. Similarly, research by Paffenholz (2019) indicates that local peace committees contribute to sustainable peacebuilding by creating spaces for inclusive dialogue and addressing root causes of conflict at the community level. Moreover, contemporary peacebuilding discourse increasingly recognises the importance of strategic communication in shaping peace processes and outcomes. According to Fairey (2024), strategic narratives play a crucial role in peacebuilding contexts, as communication strategies must be designed to counteract conflict narratives whilst simultaneously promoting peace-oriented discourse that resonates with local communities. Additionally, empirical research by Sändig et al. (2024) demonstrates that effective peacebuilding communication requires careful consideration of environmental contexts, power dynamics, and historical grievances that may influence message reception and interpretation. Within the African context, peacebuilding communication strategies have been increasingly recognised as essential components of conflict transformation and sustainable peace initiatives. Notably, recent scholarship by Kifle and Mekonnen (2024) demonstrates that African peacebuilding approaches are distinguished by their emphasis on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and community-based peace structures, with traditional methods showing significant effectiveness in addressing localised communal conflicts. Furthermore, research conducted by Dalmer and Ide (2023) reveals that peace committees in African contexts have evolved to incorporate both traditional and modern communication technologies, creating hybrid approaches that enhance their effectiveness in reaching diverse community segments. Consequently, the role of communication in African peacebuilding has been extensively documented, with particular attention to how local languages and cultural practices shape peace messaging effectiveness. According to contemporary research by Mensah et al. (2024), successful peacebuilding communication in African contexts requires deep understanding of local epistemologies and indigenous knowledge systems that inform community perceptions of conflict and peace. Similarly, recent analysis emphasises that peace committees in African societies function as cultural institutions that leverage traditional communication methods, including storytelling, proverbs, and communal gatherings, to disseminate peace messages and facilitate reconciliation processes. Additionally, empirical studies across the African continent have highlighted the significance of gender-inclusive and youth-engaged communication strategies within peacebuilding initiatives. Research demonstrates that women's participation in peace committees

significantly enhances the effectiveness of communication strategies, particularly in addressing gender-based violence and promoting inclusive peace processes. Moreover, contemporary analysis reveals that youth engagement in peace committee activities strengthens intergenerational communication and ensures sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives across African communities, as evidenced in various conflict-affected regions throughout the continent.

Within Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape, peacebuilding communication strategies have gained increased prominence following decades of ethnic, religious, and resource-based conflicts across different regions. Research by the United States Institute of Peace (2021) indicates that Nigeria's approach to peacebuilding has evolved from reactive conflict management to proactive peace architecture that emphasises prevention, early warning, and community-based interventions, with state-level peacebuilding agencies emerging as innovative solutions for localised conflict resolution. Furthermore, analysis demonstrates that Nigerian peacebuilding initiatives increasingly recognise the importance of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional authority structures in designing effective communication strategies. Specifically, the establishment of peace committees across Nigerian states has been documented as a significant development in the country's peacebuilding architecture. According to the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (2024), peace committees in Nigeria serve multiple functions including early warning, conflict mediation, peace education, and community reconciliation, with the Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system fostering collaboration among local community members, youth, security agencies, and civil society organisations. Additionally, empirical studies reveal that the success of peace committees in Nigeria is significantly influenced by their ability to develop culturally appropriate communication strategies that resonate with diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Furthermore, the Nigerian context presents unique challenges for peacebuilding communication, particularly in regions affected by resource extraction conflicts and environmental degradation. Research demonstrates that communities in oil-producing regions, particularly in Rivers State, require specialised communication approaches that address environmental justice concerns whilst promoting peaceful coexistence between different stakeholders. Similarly, studies emphasise that effective peacebuilding communication in Nigeria must address historical grievances, power imbalances, and structural inequalities that perpetuate conflicts at the community level, necessitating comprehensive approaches that integrate both traditional and contemporary conflict

resolution methods. Rivers State, as one of Nigeria's major oil-producing regions, presents a particularly complex environment for peacebuilding communication strategies due to the intersection of environmental, economic, and social factors that contribute to community conflicts. Recent research indicates that peacebuilding initiatives in Rivers State must address multiple layers of conflict, including youth restiveness, inter-community disputes, and environmental degradation resulting from oil extraction activities. Moreover, analysis demonstrates that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Rivers State communities have been significantly impacted by modernisation processes, necessitating innovative approaches that combine indigenous and contemporary peacebuilding methods.

Particularly, the role of peace committees in Rivers State has been recognised as crucial for addressing localised conflicts and promoting community cohesion. According to empirical research, peace committees in Rivers State communities serve as vital intermediaries between government institutions and grassroots populations, utilising culturally embedded communication strategies to facilitate dialogue and conflict resolution. Furthermore, studies reveal that the effectiveness of peace committees in Rivers State is significantly enhanced when communication strategies are designed to address specific community needs and incorporate local languages and cultural practices that reflect the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Niger Delta region. Consequently, the specific context of Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere communities in Gokana Local Government Area represents a microcosm of broader peacebuilding challenges within Rivers State, where environmental degradation, economic marginalisation, and social tensions intersect to create complex conflict dynamics. Research demonstrates that communities in Gokana LGA have experienced prolonged environmental degradation and social disruption due to oil extraction activities, requiring comprehensive peacebuilding approaches that address both immediate conflicts and underlying structural issues. Additionally, analysis emphasises that effective communication strategies in these communities must be sensitive to local power dynamics, traditional authority structures, and historical grievances that shape community perceptions and responses to peacebuilding initiatives.

Peacebuilding within conflict-ridden communities such as Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere in Gokana Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria, is layered with complexities that call for deeper investigation particularly around the role of local peace committees in influencing communication strategies. Contemporary scholarship has

increasingly recognised that sustainable peace requires comprehensive understanding of how grassroots mechanisms function within specific contextual frameworks (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018, p. 267). Whilst there has been increasing global and regional emphasis on the use of grassroots mechanisms to mediate and resolve conflicts, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding how these local structures actively shape the formulation and delivery of communication for peacebuilding, especially in African societies experiencing conflict over resources. Lederach (2005) insightfully argues that "peacebuilding requires a vision that transcends the cycles of violence, rooted in the moral imagination of local actors" (p. 34). This perspective underscores the importance of engaging community-driven initiatives in sustaining peace, a notion further supported by recent empirical evidence from Firchow and Mac Ginty (2020) who demonstrate that "local peacebuilding initiatives demonstrate greater sustainability when they incorporate indigenous communication practices and cultural frameworks" (p. 445). However, many studies in the existing literature tend to frame peacebuilding within broader theoretical constructs, often overlooking the specific ways in which local peace committees influence communication processes that are contextually grounded.

Statement of the Problem

There exists a pressing need for empirical evidence that sheds light on how such committees either enable or inhibit meaningful communication within communities marked by ethnic diversity and resource scarcity. Recent research by Mahmoud and Makoond (2021, p.78) emphasises that "the effectiveness of local peace committees depends significantly on their capacity to facilitate inclusive dialogue that addresses structural inequalities." For example, whilst Odendaal (2013) maintains that "local peace committees are pivotal in reducing violence by fostering dialogue" (p. 45), there remains limited in-depth analysis of how these committees shape communication strategies that resonate with the unique realities of the communities they serve. Contemporary scholarship has begun to address this limitation through more nuanced investigations. Vogel and Musamba (2019, p.234) provide compelling evidence that "successful peacebuilding communication strategies in African contexts require deep understanding of traditional governance structures and customary conflict resolution mechanisms". Similarly, Abiodun and Okechukwu (2022, p. 156) demonstrate through their mixed-methods analysis of Nigerian peacebuilding initiatives that "local peace committees function most effectively when they integrate indigenous communication protocols with contemporary conflict resolution frameworks." While

Issifu (2016) provides some insights into the roles of peace committees across Africa, his work does not delve into how these entities contribute to or impact communication outcomes in places like Gokana, where the volatile presence of oil-related disputes intensifies local tensions (Issifu, 2016, p. 152). The complexity of resource-based conflicts in Nigeria's Niger Delta region has been further explored by Idemudia and Cragg (2018, p. 89), who argue that "effective peacebuilding in extractive industry contexts requires communication strategies that address both environmental justice concerns and economic empowerment aspirations."

Likewise, Barakat and Milton (2020) stress the relevance of localised peacebuilding efforts but fall short of capturing the communicative dimensions crucial to achieving long-term stability (Barakat & Milton, 2020, p. 149). This limitation has been acknowledged by more recent scholarship, with Bamidele and Adebayo (2023, p. 203) noting that "the communication architecture of peacebuilding processes in Nigeria remains under-theorised despite its critical importance in conflict transformation." Recent methodological advances in peacebuilding research have emphasised the importance of participatory approaches that centre local voices and experiences. Cederman and Vogt (2017, p. 312) demonstrate through their comprehensive analysis that "quantitative assessments of peacebuilding effectiveness must be complemented by qualitative investigations that capture the nuanced dynamics of local communication processes." This methodological imperative is particularly relevant for understanding the Niger Delta context, where environmental degradation intersects with ethnic tensions and resource competition.

Furthermore, the emergence of digital communication technologies has transformed the landscape of peacebuilding communication. Research by Nyabola (2021, p.98) reveals that "local peace committees in African contexts increasingly utilise hybrid communication strategies that blend traditional dialogue mechanisms with digital platforms." This technological dimension adds another layer of complexity to understanding how local peace committees influence communication strategies in contemporary conflict settings. This study, therefore, aims to fill these existing gaps by exploring the specific ways in which peace committees in Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere influence the development, execution, and outcomes of peacebuilding communication strategy. The research aims to contribute a nuanced and context-sensitive perspective to the broader discourse on grassroots peace efforts, providing empirical clarity on how local actors influence strategic communication for conflict resolution. The theoretical significance of

this investigation lies in its potential to advance understanding of what Autesserre (2021) terms "the micro-dynamics of peacebuilding," particularly how "local institutional arrangements mediate the relationship between communication practices and conflict transformation outcomes" (p. 178). By focusing specifically on the communication dimensions of local peace committee activities, this research addresses a critical gap identified by recent literature. By providing a detailed analysis of communication processes within specific local peace committees, this study will contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical knowledge that can inform policy development and programme implementation in similar contexts across the Niger Delta region and beyond.

The following are the specific objectives of this study:

1. To identify the challenges and opportunities that have shaped and continue to influence ACD's communication strategy in the context of Kegbara Dere (K-Dere) and Baranyowa Dere (B-Dere) communities' peacebuilding in Gokana, Rivers State.
2. To develop a set of recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of ACD's communication strategy in the context of Kegbara Dere (K-Dere) and Baranyowa Dere (B-Dere) communities peacebuilding in Gokana, Rivers State.

Literature Review

The design and implementation of peacebuilding communication strategies within conflict-affected communities face multifaceted challenges that require a comprehensive understanding of local contexts and stakeholder dynamics. Contemporary research demonstrates that effective peacebuilding communication necessitates a nuanced appreciation of cultural sensitivities, power structures, and historical grievances that characterise communities experiencing protracted conflicts (Chuma & Msimang, 2020, p. 87). Moreover, the successful integration of peace committees into communication strategy frameworks demands careful consideration of legitimacy, representation, and capacity-building requirements (Adan & Pkalya, 2018, p. 112).

Empirical evidence suggests that one of the primary challenges confronting peacebuilding communication strategies lies in establishing credible channels of information dissemination whilst maintaining neutrality amongst competing community factions. Research indicates that communication interventions often struggle with issues of perceived bias, particularly when external organisations attempt to mediate between

conflicting parties without adequate understanding of underlying grievances (Van der Merwe & Mynhardt, 2019, p. 204). Furthermore, the sustainability of communication initiatives frequently depends upon the extent to which local ownership is fostered through participatory design processes (Menkhaus, 2017, p. 156).

Significant opportunities emerge when peacebuilding communication strategies successfully harness indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional communication networks. Studies reveal that communities possessing established peace committees demonstrate enhanced capacity for conflict prevention and early warning systems when these structures are effectively integrated into broader communication frameworks (Ojielo & Gach, 2021, p. 45). Additionally, the utilisation of culturally appropriate communication channels, including traditional media and community gatherings, significantly amplifies the reach and impact of peacebuilding messages (Kagwanja & Mutahi, 2016, p. 78).

The implementation phase presents distinct challenges related to resource mobilisation, capacity development, and institutional coordination. Research demonstrates that many peacebuilding communication initiatives encounter difficulties in securing sustained funding, particularly for long-term engagement activities essential for building trust and establishing behavioural change (Brounéus & Vogel, 2022, p. 321). Consequently, the effectiveness of such strategies often depends upon the development of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks that can demonstrate tangible outcomes to stakeholders and funding organisations (Donais & McCandless, 2017, p. 299). The enhancement of peacebuilding communication strategy effectiveness requires the establishment of comprehensive needs assessment protocols that prioritise community voice and participation in strategy design. Research suggests that interventions achieving sustainable impact typically employ participatory action research methodologies that enable communities to identify their own communication priorities and preferred engagement mechanisms (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016, p. 321). Therefore, organisations implementing peacebuilding communication strategies should invest significantly in community consultation processes prior to strategy development.

The sustainability of peacebuilding communication initiatives demands the development of local capacity through systematic training programmes for peace committee members and community leaders. Empirical evidence indicates that communities demonstrating long-term conflict prevention capabilities typically possess well-trained local facilitators capable of managing dialogue processes and implementing

early warning mechanisms independently (Allen & Gbowee, 2020, p. 134). Accordingly, capacity-building should encompass technical communication skills, conflict analysis competencies, and strategic planning capabilities.

The integration of technology-enhanced communication platforms presents considerable opportunities for expanding reach and improving feedback mechanisms within peacebuilding initiatives. Contemporary research demonstrates that mobile communication technologies, when appropriately adapted to local contexts, can significantly enhance information sharing and community engagement in peace processes (Tellidis & Kappler, 2016, p. 89). However, such technological interventions must be carefully designed to ensure accessibility and avoid exacerbating existing digital divides. Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of peacebuilding communication strategies requires the establishment of robust institutional partnerships between implementing organisations, government agencies, and community structures. Research indicates that successful peacebuilding initiatives typically develop multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms that ensure continuity beyond project implementation periods (Clements & Lelliott, 2023, p. 412). Therefore, strategy design should prioritise the creation of formal agreements and resource-sharing arrangements that support ongoing communication activities and maintain momentum for peace processes.

Theoretical Framework

In conflict-prone regions such as Gokana, Rivers State, sustainable peacebuilding demands more than mere conflict resolution it requires transformative approaches that engage the structural roots of conflict. Conflict Transformation Theory offers a nuanced framework for analysing peace efforts by viewing conflict not solely as a negative force, but as a potential driver of constructive change. This theory underscores the importance of addressing underlying issues, empowering local actors, and fostering long-term peace through inclusive and participatory processes. Prominent theorists like Lederach (1995), Galtung (1969), and Van der Merwe (1999) have advanced this framework by highlighting the multi-layered nature of conflict, the significance of social justice, and the central role of community ownership. Lederach, in particular, posits that transformation occurs through relationship-building and sustained dialogue, while Galtung introduces the notion of 'positive peace' that prioritises equity and the fulfilment of human needs.

At the heart of Conflict Transformation Theory are key principles: conflict is complex and multi-dimensional; root causes must be addressed; local empowerment is essential; sustainable peace requires a

long-term perspective; and every conflict contains seeds of positive change. Applying these principles to Accord for Community Development's (ACD) communication strategies in Gokana, particularly its use of community dialogue, offers a relevant and insightful lens. Community dialogue serves as a platform for inclusive engagement, allowing stakeholders to express grievances, build empathy, and collectively explore solutions. Guided by the tenets of transformation theory, such dialogues delve into the socioeconomic and political roots of conflict, enabling local voices especially those historically marginalized to shape peacebuilding outcomes. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and strengthens community resilience. Moreover, dialogue builds social capital, cultivates trust, and equips community members with conflict resolution skills, all of which contribute to sustained peace. In contexts like Gokana, where the conflict is entrenched and multifaceted, ACD's focus on community-driven dialogue aligns well with the transformative vision needed to move beyond surface-level resolution. By grounding its strategies in Conflict Transformation Theory, ACD enhances its capacity to effect meaningful, lasting peace through communication.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the impact of ACD's communication interventions on community dynamics in post-conflict settings. By combining both methodologies, the research achieves a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena, as advocated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). The convergent parallel design facilitates simultaneous data collection and analysis, enhancing validity and reliability through methodological triangulation (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This approach, grounded in Creswell's and Cheek's frameworks, ensures theoretical, methodological, and ethical rigour, making it well-suited for examining multifaceted communication interventions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2019; Morgan, 2020). Qualitative data is gathered through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis of ACD's strategic communication materials, providing rich insights into stakeholder perspectives and organisational strategies (Palinkas et al., 2015; Bowen, 2019). Quantitative data is collected via structured questionnaires, with a sample of 430 participants—400 for quantitative surveys and 30 for qualitative components—aligned with guidelines for statistical power and qualitative saturation (Morse, 2015). Sampling employs stratified and purposive techniques to ensure representativeness across community

demographics, including leaders, youth, and women’s groups, minimising bias and enhancing external validity (Patton, 2021; Taherdoost, 2016).

To ensure robustness, the study incorporates expert reviews, pilot testing, and triangulation, adhering to established protocols (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). Instrument credibility is reinforced through inter-rater reliability checks and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency (Taber, 2018). Expert consultations further validate content and methodological rigour (Hayashi et al., 2019). Quantitative analysis, conducted using SPSS 26.0, employs descriptive statistics, inferential testing, and correlation analysis to explore variable relationships (Field, 2020; Pallant, 2020). A weighted mean threshold of 3.0 guides Likert-scale interpretations, with scores above indicating agreement and those below suggesting neutrality or disagreement (Tavakol & Dennick, 2021). Qualitative data is analysed thematically, using inductive and deductive coding to identify patterns while aligning with theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2016). Ethical considerations prioritise participant confidentiality in sensitive post-conflict contexts, ensuring data integrity and authenticity (Kaiser, 2019). Findings are presented thematically and statistically, fostering a holistic understanding of ACD’s communication impact (Bazeley, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Challenges and opportunities that have shaped and influenced ACD’s community strategy for peace building in Kegbara Dere (K-Dere and Baranyowa Dere (B-Dere communities in Gokana, Rivers State.

This study intends to interrogate the challenges and opportunities that have defined, and are still shaping ACD’s communication strategy within the context of peacebuilding in the communities being studied. The analysis of response to the statements on this shown in Table 3 below would help us understand what constraints effective communication and what fosters it.

Table 1: Respondents views on the opportunities and challenges influencing ACD's peacebuilding communication strategy in Kegbara Dere

(K-Dere) and Baranyowa Dere (B-Dere) communities' in Gokana, Rivers State.

S / n	Nature of statement	Level of Agreement					$\sum f$	$\sum f^2$	Mean (x)	Rank	Remark
		A	S	U	D	SD					
1	Limited access to communication technologies (mobile phones) has hindered the reach of Peace Committee messages.	75	47	1	8	16	3	94	2.	1	Disagree
				6	5	1	8	2	45 th	0	
2	Distrust and historical grievances between the warring communities have posed challenges to open communication and dialogue.	96	84	7	2	10	3	11	3.	6 th	Agreed
				6	4	4	8	28	12	5	
3	Language barriers (multiple dialects spoken) sometimes create obstacles to effective communication within and between the communities.	61	72	1	9	14	3	96	2.	8 th	Disagree
				2	3	6	8	1	50		
4	Limited financial resources have restricted the Peace Committees' ability to utilize certain communication channels (printing materials, radio broadcasts).	96	42	1	11	11	3	10	2.	9 th	Disagree
				7	1	8	8	39	71		
5	External influences, such as political tensions or economic pressures, sometimes disrupt the communication and peacebuilding efforts of the Peace Committees.	99	15	1	9	24	3	13	3.	2 nd	Agreed
			4	6	1		8	17	56		
6	The strong oral traditions in K-Dere and B-Dere provide an opportunity to leverage storytelling and community gatherings for effective communication.	92	64	9	5	72	3	11	3.	6 th	Agreed
				9	4		8	93	12		
7	The existence of respected community leaders and elders offers a valuable resource for facilitating communication and mediation.	10	12	2	5	74	3	12	3.	5 th	Agreed
		3	2	9	6		8	76	32		
8	The Peace Committees have successfully utilized local languages and translators to	11	10	2	12	20	3	13	3.	4 th	Agreed
		4	8	0	2		8	26	45		

bridge communication gaps.											
9	The communities' strong social	97	22	2	3	4	3	15	3.	1	Agre
.	networks and word-of-mouth	1	9	3			8	26	97	st	ed
	communication have proven to be						4				
	effective in disseminating										
	information.										
1	The growing awareness and	10	12	6	4	47	3	13	3.	3	Agre
0	support for peacebuilding	7	8	0	2		8	58	54	rd	ed
	initiatives among government						4				
	officials and NGOs provide										
	opportunities for collaboration										
	and resource mobilization.										
Aggregate Mean									3.	Agre	
									07	ed	

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2024.

Communication strategy used in any intervention is designed in such a way to achieve the goal of the strategy, which is, to achieve effectively communicate messages, intentions or ideals of those communicating to the target audience or participant. In development communication, it is done in such a way that not only allows for the participation of target audience in the process of message design but also in it delivery. However, communication are usually faced with certain challenges that might impede on its effectiveness as well as also opportunities which could also enhance its effectiveness. From the analysis presented in Table 3, respondents agreed that the used of social networks and interpersonal communication especially during community dialogue serves as an opportunity or way that contributed to the effectiveness of the strategy (Mean = 3.97). Furthermore, another area of opportunity utilized by the organization in the deployment of the strategy as agreed by respondents in this study was the support for the initiative from government agencies and agents (Mean = 3.54). Similarly, respondents also agreed that understanding of the peace initiative was further supported by it choice of including trusted and respected leaders from both communities (Mean = 3.32), it utilization of local languages and translators (Mean = 3.45) as well as the adoption of oral traditions in relating the historical development of both communities as other opportunities that aided the communication strategy positively (Mean = 3.12). An interviewee emphasizes the importance of respected community leaders and elders in facilitating communication and mediation between Kedere and Bedere:

"So, getting trusted leadership here and the same form of leadership there to talk over issues has also been helpful. Getting the security to understand, particularly when they come,...we try to enlighten them also to realize that when there is an issue

between Kedere and Bedere, you need to treat it with respect because it can spark serious consequences and some of them have listened to us and followed that. "(*Interaction at an Interview session with Chief Baton Mitten, the Chairman of the Council of Chief and Elders, Kedere, Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State*-Personal Communication, July, 2024)

However, in the face of these opportunities, the strategy implementation was faced with certain challenges that affected its effectiveness. Respondents from the analysis presented in Table 4.3, agreed that external influences stemming mainly from political tensions and economic pressure especially land disputes and resource control was a challenge to the peace-building initiative (Mean = 3.56). Similarly, respondents agreed that distrust and unaddressed historical grievances with regards to land ownership and resource control with some case still being litigated on in court posed a significant challenge to the initiative aimed at peacebuilding in the study area. Buttressing this view, is the response, Chief Val Bisvase stated thus:

The first time... the actual cause of the war between Kedere and Bedere can be traced to land disputes and resource control (oil wells). Another cause of the conflict is youth restiveness, especially cult related activities between Dey-Gan and Dey wel-cult boys.... So, I am telling you that apart from known issues, the other is traced to historical grievance which is still being addressed" (*Interview Session with Chief Val Bisvase, Member, Bedere Council of Chief Bedere, Bedere, Gokana Local Government Area, River State*.-Personal Communication, July 2024).

Based on the aggregate mean of 3.07 and the foregoing analysis and interpretations, it could be deduced here that the peace committee communication strategy adopted to bring about peacebuilding and resolution of the conflict between the communities leveraged on the opportunities analyzed to implement its initiative. However, the challenge of external influence, political tension, economic pressures and historical grievances that were challenges facing the initiative, the organization's ability to leverage on the opportunities mentioned provided it with the likelihood of the effectively implementation of the strategy in the study area. Although these challenges also presented the organization the chance of a review on how to come up with ways by which these can be addressed in the long-run so as to achieve sustainable peace in the area.

Recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of ACD’s Communication Strategy in Kegbara Dere (K-Dere) and Beranyowa Dere (B-Dere) communities in Gohana, Rivers State.

To advance as well as achieve sustainability of the communication strategy used in the peacebuilding initiatives adopted by the organization, the study sought for recommendations from the survey in this regards. The results of the data analysed was presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Respondents views on the recommendations for for enhancing the sustainability of ACD's communication strategy used in peacebuilding between Kegbara Dere (K-Dere) and Baranyowa Dere (B-Dere) communities in Gokana, Rivers State.

S / n	Nature of statement	Level of Agreement					$\sum f$	$\sum fx$	Me an (x)	Ra nk	Rem ark
		S A	A	U D	D	S D					
1	The Peace Committees should train members' sustainable peacebuilding practices and processes that could be deployed to tame imminent or future conflict.	15	16	20	17	25	38	15	4.0	5 th	Agre ed
2	The Peace Committees should explore the use of the use of short message services (SMS) not WhatsApp message that requires data to reach a wider audience and facilitate two-way communication.	15	15	40	16	17	38	15	4.0	4 th	Agre ed

3	The Peace	1	14	4	32	25	38	15	3.9	7 th	Agre
.	Committees should partner with local radio stations or create community radio programs to disseminate information and promote dialogue.	4	3	0			4	0	09		ed
		4						1			
4	The Peace	1	16	2	33	17	38	15	3.9	6 th	Agre
.	Committees should establish a dedicated communication team or focal point to coordinate and re-evaluate the communication strategies for effectiveness.	4	2	8			4	3	97		ed
		4						5			
5	The Peace	2	10	2	8	26	38	16	4.2	2 nd	Agre
.	Committees should regularly conduct community surveys or focus group discussions to gather feedback on their communication efforts.	1	8	6			4	3	50		ed
		6						2			
6	The Peace	1	14	4	30	29	38	14	3.8	8 th	Agre
.	Committees can make use of songs and drama that resonate with the local culture, understandable, communicate consequence and need for peaceful coexistence.	3	9	2			4	8	57		ed
		4						1			

7	The Peace	2	10	2	14	16	38	16	4.3	1 st	Agre
.	Committees should	2	6	8			4	5	02		ed
	actively engage	0						2			
	youth and women										
	in communication										
	initiatives,										
	recognizing their										
	influential roles in										
	the community.										
8	The Peace	1	15	0	41	14	38	15	4.2	3 rd	Agre
.	Committees can	7	1				4	9	47		ed
	collaborate with	8						0			
	other local										
	organizations,										
	government										
	agencies, and										
	NGOs to amplify										
	their										
	communication										
	reach and impact										
	on peacebuilding.										
	Aggregate Mean								4.0		Agr
									9		eed

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2024.

From the analysis presented in Table 2, respondents agreed that there is the need to provide a space for the inclusion of the youth and women leaders from both communities in the peace committee because in most cases, there are the instigators of the violence as well as those who bears the brunt of consequences of violence in any conflict (Mean = 4.30). More so, respondents were of the views that there should be a kind of discussion that would elicit talks and feedback. From community members that would bolster the strategy in achieving its long term goal of sustainable peace in the area (Mean = 4.25).

In an interview session with Chief Penu, he emphasizes the importance of youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts, highlighting their influential roles in the community:

My suggestion will be that, let both communities put a check on their children, on their young ones, because like an old man, what will I go, why will I go and cause problems? Because my...is restricted to my...but these younger ones that they journey goes

to one place, do one thing or the other, causing problems and all that." (*Interaction in an Interview Session with Chief M.S. Penu JP, the chairman Barawedera Council of Chiefs and Elders, Bedere, Gokana Local Government Area, Rivers State*-Personal Communication, July 2024).

The need to foster collaboration with other organization, like Faith Based and Community Based Organization as government agencies and political influences to amplify the initiative peacebuilding efforts was also supported by the respondents (Mean = 4.25). Explaining the effort of the peace committee in ensuring the inclusion and participation of community members in the peace building process. The interviewee has this to say in this regard:

There was a kind of a market unification that came up. Wherein if you are from this community, you can come and market here today so, they were allowed to buy from each other you can go here you buy whatever you want to buy people from different communities also come in to buy after that, we now put up a joint kind of church prayer session, I can call it, a crusade that was held at that boundary where that crisis took place, so, the tradition-religious leaders came from both communities came, and became members of the committee alongside the CAN-Christian Association of Nigeria Gokana Chapter to come up with a kind of a Crusade-revival crusade where in the two communities were allowed to come together in intensive prayer, fasting prayer praising of God and all of that after which we now sequence it with football ... until today, there has never been any escalation." (*Comrade Promise Viidoma, Secretary of the Gokana Peace Management Committee, Gokana Local Government Area, River State*.-Personal Communication, July 2024.)

Furthermore, respondents agreed that the use of Short Message Services (SMS) (Mean = 4.09), training of Peace Committee Member on sustainable peacebuilding practices (Mean = 4.08) as well as appoint those within the committee from both communities and the organization to regularly evaluate the progress in the imitative towards achieving long lasting peace between the areas. On a lighter note and in a most soothing way, the respondents were of the views that the peace dialogue should not all be talk as tools like song, dance and drama could also be adopted to highlights causes and consequences of conflict as well as the effect of peaceful coexistence in the area (Mean = 3.86). Based on the aggregate mean value of 4.09, it could be deduced here that respondents

believed and agreed that these suggested recommendations, could go a long in strengthening as well as advancing the strategy in achieving sustainable peacebuilding in the areas significantly.

Discussion

The study found that entrenched historical grievances and distrust between K-Dere and B-Dere communities posed substantial barriers to open communication. Respondents expressed a preference for communication strategies that incorporate local cultural practices, a finding that aligns with the Community Participation Theory, which advocates for context-specific strategies that resonate with community traditions and norms (Arnstein, 1969 cited in Ogbe, 2023). Empirical evidence supports the assertion that fostering relationships based on mutual understanding and respect is fundamental in transforming conflict (Fisher, 2000). The research findings indicate that ACD's efforts to create structures for community engagement through peace committees have the potential to bridge trust deficits, subsequently paving the way for more sustainable communication strategies.

The findings elucidate significant implications for Conflict Transformation Theory, which posits that addressing the root causes of conflict requires more than mere resolution; it necessitates a transformative process that alters relationships and social structures (Lederach, 1997). ACD's communication strategy, particularly the formation of peace committees, serves as a conduit for transformation by facilitating dialogue and promoting reconciliation among community members. The empirical data, which underscores the positive reception of inclusive communication practices, reinforces the importance of developing relational capacities within communities, essential for catalysing change and fostering a culture of peace (Schnabel & Caruso, 2019). Moreover, the study's findings signal an opportunity for ACD to embrace a more adaptive approach to communication, integrating feedback from community members to continually refine strategies as contexts evolve. Incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms alongside contemporary communication tools could augment ACD's effectiveness, crafting a robust framework that resonates with the nuanced dynamics of local communities.

Furthermore, the findings resonate deeply with Community Participation Theory, which prioritises the active involvement of individuals in decision-making processes that affect their lives. According to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, ACD's strategy appears to predominantly operate between the levels of consultation and partnership. While community dialogues are a commendable step, the potential for deeper

engagement through collaborative decision-making remains unexploited. For instance, respondents expressed the need for more inclusivity, signalling a desire for a participatory model where community voices directly inform strategic choices. In studies examining effective community engagement, such as those conducted by Fitzpatrick & Pizarro (2021), the narrative of joint ownership of peacebuilding initiatives correlates positively with long-term sustainability and conflict mitigation effectiveness. The findings suggest that ACD could enhance its communication strategy by empowering community members to jointly determine the agenda and mechanisms of their peace processes, ensuring that initiatives reflect local needs and aspirations.

Conclusion

This study has critically illuminated the intricate roles that local peace committees play in shaping peacebuilding communication strategies within communities deeply affected by historical grievances and resource-based conflict. Drawing upon the complex realities of Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere in Gokana LGA, the research underscores that sustainable peace is not merely a function of external intervention, but rather a deeply participatory process embedded in indigenous structures, cultural consciousness, and trust-based engagement. Through the lens of Conflict Transformation Theory and Community Participation frameworks, it becomes evident that the integration of respected local leaders, traditional communication methods, and inclusive platforms for dialogue is central to fostering enduring social cohesion. The findings highlight that, while challenges such as political interference, economic tension, and unresolved intercommunal disputes persist, local peace committees remain invaluable agents for mediating tensions and restoring trust through communication strategies that resonate authentically with communal identities. Moreover, the study draws attention to the urgent need for peacebuilding initiatives to move beyond mere dissemination of information toward fostering participatory spaces that empower marginalised groups particularly women and youth whose lived experiences are often most impacted by conflict and who, therefore, hold the transformative potential to reshape peace narratives.

In synthesising the insights gained, this research offers more than a documentation of communication mechanisms; it presents a compelling case for rethinking peacebuilding as a co-produced, community-centred endeavour. The peace committees' effectiveness lies not solely in their structural presence, but in their capacity to reflect the moral imagination and aspirations of their people. Consequently, future peacebuilding efforts must intentionally harness local capacities, embrace cultural

nuance, and institutionalise feedback loops that affirm the voice of the grassroots. In so doing, communication for peace transcends rhetoric and becomes a lived, evolving practice of mutual recognition, resilience, and transformation within conflict-affected communities.

Recommendations

The following four recommendations are proposed to enhance the efficacy and sustainability of peacebuilding communication strategies in Kegbara Dere and Baranyowa Dere communities.

1. Sustainable peacebuilding requires the intentional inclusion of youth and women in all stages of communication planning and implementation. Their lived experiences and social positioning within the community provide unique perspectives that can deepen the relevance and reach of peace messages. Beyond tokenism, mechanisms should be established to ensure their active representation within peace committees and leadership structures.
2. To foster ownership and mutual accountability, the peace committees should regularly conduct structured community consultations such as focus group discussions, town hall meetings, and participatory surveys. These platforms will not only gather feedback on communication efforts but also provide community members with a sense of agency in shaping peace narratives that reflect their collective aspirations.
3. The use of indigenous storytelling, music, and drama should be systematically incorporated into peace messaging. These forms resonate with local epistemologies and serve as powerful vehicles for conveying complex themes such as reconciliation, forgiveness, and communal responsibility. Such creative approaches also bridge generational gaps and facilitate inter-group understanding.
4. Peace committees should collaborate with local radio stations, civil society groups, faith-based organisations, and governmental agencies to amplify their reach. A dedicated communications unit within the peace committee, with trained personnel, should oversee the planning, implementation, and evaluation of communication strategies. This structure ensures consistency, innovation, and responsiveness to emerging dynamics.

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