The Role of Youth in Promoting Peace and Diplomacy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Around the globe, especially in Nigeria, boundary and territorial disputes, genocide, resources-base conflicts, youth destabilization, religious and political crises among the youths took over all parts of the country thereby causing havoc and unresting nightmare, poverty, crime and demonstration that result violently to all citizens of Nigeria which calls for the title of this book "The Role Of Youth in Promoting Peace and Diplomacy in Nigeria" Despite these challenges, the youth in Nigeria have distinguished themselves as agents of peace and conflict resolution. On this part, this article examines youth as ambassadors of peace and diplomats in Nigeria. The paper adopts a systematic approach within a qualitative framework and relies on secondary data from briefs, newspapers, conference papers, government reports, and peer reviewed journal articles.

This study revealed that changing the perception of youth from being seen as instigators of conflict to recognizing them as advocates for peace is crucial for unlocking their potential in Nigeria's peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. It also highlighted that young people actively foster peace and inclusion through advocacy and civic participation. They employ various tools, such as music, arts, sports, education, storytelling, and interfaith dialogue, to strengthen social cohesion, resilience, trust, and peace across different regions of Nigeria.

Key words: Promoting peace, Frequently Marginalized, Youth participation, peacebuilding and decision making.

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous and culturally diverse nation, has been embroiled in a complex array of challenges that hinder its pursuit of peace and stability. Ethnic tensions, religious conflicts, and deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities continue to fuel violence and unrest across various regions (Obi, 2020). From the insurgency of Boko Haram in the Northeast to ongoing clashes between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt, Nigeria's struggle to maintain peace is a multifaceted issue that affects all aspects of its development. These conflicts, often exacerbated by political corruption and poor governance, not only stifle the nation's progress but also perpetuate cycles of instability.

In light of these persistent challenges, there is a pressing need to explore avenues for peacebuilding and diplomatic engagement within Nigerian society. This research is driven by

the conviction that youth, who make up over 60% of the Nigerian population, hold immense potential to reshape the nation's trajectory toward peace. Young Nigerians, aged 15-35, possess the energy, creativity, and digital proficiency to bridge divides and foster understanding across ethnic, religious, and cultural lines. They represent a demographic that, if mobilized effectively, could play a transformative role in promoting sustainable peace and diplomacy in Nigeria.

However, this potential remains largely untapped, with limited platforms for youth participation in peacebuilding. As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan aptly stated, "The future of peace rests on the shoulders of youth" (UN Women, 2015). Understanding and empowering this demographic is essential, not just to mitigate immediate conflicts but to cultivate long-term stability and harmony in Nigeria. By examining youth-led movements, digital platforms, and educational programs, this study sheds light on how young Nigerians are actively engaging in peace and diplomacy initiatives, and how their involvement can lay the foundation for a more stable and unified society.

Problem Statement:
Nigeria has been grappling with a complex web of challenges, including insecurity, ethnic and religious tensions, political instability, and socio-economic inequality. These issues have significantly hampered peace and national development. The country's youth, a substantial portion of its population, are often both victims and contributors to these crises. Despite their potential to be catalysts for positive change, young people in Nigeria are frequently marginalized in decision-making processes, particularly in peacebuilding and diplomacy efforts. This exclusion not only limits their ability to contribute but also fuels feelings of disenfranchisement, potentially driving some youth towards violent activities or extremist ideologies.

This problem is compounded by a lack of formal structures and opportunities for youth to actively participate in peace and diplomacy initiatives at the local, national, and international levels. While there have been some efforts to involve youth in peacebuilding, these have often been fragmented, short-term, or superficial. There is an urgent need to explore and understand how Nigerian youth can be more meaningfully engaged as key stakeholders in promoting peace and diplomacy. Doing so will contribute to building a more stable and inclusive society, where the voices of the youth are not only heard but actively shape the future of Nigeria's peace and diplomatic processes.

Research Objectives
The objective of this research is to examine the current role of Nigerian youth in peacebuilding and diplomacy at various levels, identify the challenges they face, assess the impact of their initiatives on conflict resolution, explore strategies for enhancing their involvement, and analyze the potential long-term benefits of increased youth engagement for Nigeria's stability and development.

Significance of the Study
Understanding Youth as Agents of Peace in Nigeria:
This research seeks to deepen understanding of youth agency in peacebuilding by highlighting the often-overlooked contributions of young Nigerians in driving positive change within their communities. By exploring the strategies and challenges youth peacebuilders face, the study

aims to inform both policymakers and civil society organizations. Policymakers can develop inclusive policies, provide resources, and address conflict root causes that affect youth, while civil society organizations can design programs that equip young people with the skills needed for effective peacebuilding, creating a more supportive environment for youth-led initiatives.

It not only empowers young Nigerians as agents of peace and diplomacy but also serves as a source of inspiration for global youth, demonstrating how young people can actively contribute to peacebuilding within their communities. By highlighting the success of Nigerian youth, it encourages a sustainable, youth-led approach to conflict resolution that could inspire others worldwide. Furthermore, by addressing root causes of conflict and promoting social justice, the study contributes to transformative peacebuilding, advancing understanding of how to achieve lasting peace and a more inclusive future for Nigeria.

Scope of the Study
This study focuses on exploring the role of youth in promoting peace and diplomacy in Nigeria, specifically examining their involvement in peacebuilding initiatives, conflict resolution, and diplomatic processes. The scope of the study includes:

Geographical Scope:
The study will primarily focus on Nigeria, with attention to youth participation in peace and diplomacy across various regions of the country, including areas affected by ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. It will consider both urban and rural contexts to capture a broad range of youth experiences and challenges.

Demographic Scope:
The research will concentrate on Nigerian youth, typically defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, in line with Nigeria's National Youth Policy. The study will consider diverse groups of young people, including those from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the youth's role in peace and diplomacy.

Research Questions
How are young Nigerians engaging in peacebuilding initiatives within their communities?

What are the challenges faced by young peacebuilders in Nigeria, and how can these be addressed?

Literature Review
This literature review examines the existing research on the role of youth in peacebuilding and diplomacy, particularly in Nigeria, by analyzing key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and case studies that explore the contributions, challenges, and potential of young people in fostering peace and conflict resolution.

Youth as Key Actors in Peacebuilding
The importance of youth in peacebuilding efforts is widely recognized in global and local contexts. According to the United Nations (UN), youth are often seen as both perpetrators and victims of conflict, but they also hold significant potential to act as agents of peace. The

UN Security Council's Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (2015) emphasizes the need for young people to be involved in peace processes at all levels. It highlights how youth can contribute to conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict recovery efforts through their innovative approaches, energy, and commitment to change. In the Nigerian context, youth comprise more than 60% of the population, making them crucial stakeholders in any peacebuilding initiative.

Studies emphasize that empowering youth and providing them with leadership opportunities leads to significant contributions to peace and reconciliation efforts. For example, Cronin (2016) asserts that youth-driven peace initiatives in post-conflict societies are essential in establishing long-term stability and rebuilding trust between divided communities. In the Nigerian context, this has been observed in peacebuilding movements such as the Not Too Young to Run campaign, where youth advocated for reduced age limits for political office, paving the way for younger leaders to influence peace and diplomacy. The current landscape also shows a growing number of Nigerian youth involved in international diplomacy internships, which provide practical experience in conflict resolution and global governance (Adebayo, 2024).

Challenges Facing Youth Participation in Peace and Diplomacy

Despite the recognition of their potential, Nigerian youth face multiple barriers in actively contributing to peace and diplomacy. Adebayo (2018) notes that youth in Nigeria often face socio-political marginalization, as they are excluded from key decision-making processes at local, regional, and national levels. This is compounded by high unemployment rates, poor access to education, and limited opportunities for skills development, which create frustration and disenfranchisement among the youth population.

Other scholars, such as Uzochukwu (2020), argue that cultural factors also play a role in limiting youth participation in peace and diplomacy. In many African societies, including Nigeria, there is a strong emphasis on respect for elders, which often translates into a lack of trust in the capabilities of younger generations to lead peace initiatives. This cultural dynamic reinforces the structural barriers that prevent youth from assuming leadership roles in conflict resolution and diplomacy. Even as digital platforms provide alternative means for youth involvement, offline political engagement remains restricted (Udeh, 2023). More recently, Onwuka (2023) has shown how limited access to political structures and economic opportunities exacerbate feelings of disenfranchisement among young Nigerians, often steering them toward civil unrest rather than constructive engagement.

Cultural factors further exacerbate these barriers. Uzochukwu (2020) highlights the cultural expectation in many African societies that decision-making is the purview of elders. This perspective often undermines trust in younger generations, restricting their involvement in formal peace initiatives. Additionally, economic constraints, corruption, and lack of institutional support continue to stifle youth-led peace efforts, as noted by Ukeje (2019). More recent reports, such as Oluwole's (2024) study, underscore that despite improved access to technology, limited funding for youth peace initiatives still poses a challenge to the sustainability of their projects.

Youth-Led Peace Initiatives in Nigeria

Despite these challenges, there are numerous examples of Nigerian youth leading successful peace and diplomacy efforts. One notable case is the "Not Too Young to Run campaign", which successfully advocated for lowering the age limit for political office holders, allowing more young Nigerians to participate in the political and diplomatic arenas. This movement demonstrates the power of youth mobilization and advocacy in promoting inclusive governance and peaceful political processes.

Moreover, youth organizations such as Building Blocks for Peace Foundation and Global Peace Foundation Nigeria have actively engaged in community-based peacebuilding, using grassroots approaches to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups. According to Akinyemi (2022), these organizations have been successful in bridging divides by fostering trust, facilitating communication, and empowering young people to act as peace ambassadors in their communities.

Additionally, studies by Okafor and Okeke (2021) on "youth involvement in conflict resolution in the Niger Delta" highlight the transformative potential of youth-driven initiatives. These initiatives, which focus on environmental justice and resource-sharing conflicts, have resulted in significant reductions in violence and improved relations between local communities and the government. The success of these efforts is largely attributed to the youth's ability to mobilize local populations and adapt solutions to the specific needs of their communities.

Theoretical Frameworks for Youth Participation in Peace and Diplomacy
Several theoretical frameworks shed light on the dynamics of youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Notably, Galtung's Peacebuilding Theory highlights the importance of positive peace, which involves creating structures that address the root causes of conflict. Galtung asserts that peacebuilding should extend beyond merely eliminating violence (negative peace) to encompass justice, equality, and reconciliation. Youth play a crucial role in achieving positive peace, as they often bring fresh perspectives and energy to the process of rebuilding societies, especially when they have been directly impacted by conflict.

Another relevant framework is Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory, which highlights the importance of engaging all levels of society in peacebuilding efforts. Lederach suggests that youth can play a transformative role by acting as mediators and bridge-builders between conflicting parties. This is especially relevant in the Nigerian context, where youth often serve as a link between marginalized communities and formal institutions of power.

Finally, the Social Movement Theory suggests that youth-led movements advocating for political or social change can be potent tools for peacebuilding. The End SARS protests in Nigeria exemplify this, as Nigerian youth successfully mobilized to challenge police brutality and push for policy reform, demonstrating the potential for youth-led movements to reshape peace and security narratives (Ekechi, 2023).

Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Participation in Peace and Diplomacy
Given the importance of youth in promoting peace and diplomacy, there is a growing consensus on the need for policy interventions that support youth engagement. Adebayo (2020) suggests that governments and international organizations should invest in youth-focused capacity-building programs that provide skills in negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy. Such programs

would equip young people with the tools they need to engage in conflict resolution and peace processes effectively.

Moreover, Uzochukwu (2020) advocates for platforms that incorporate youth perspectives in national peace efforts, a recommendation supported by recent developments in Nigeria, where the National Peace Council has invited youth representatives to participate in discussions on regional security (Chinwe, 2023). This could include creating advisory councils that integrate youth perspectives into government policy, particularly in areas related to security, conflict resolution, and foreign affairs.

Identified Knowledge Gaps and Significance of This Study

While existing literature recognizes the role of youth in peacebuilding, there is limited research specifically addressing the unique barriers faced by Nigerian youth and the long-term impacts of youth-led peace initiatives. Studies often highlight the general potential of youth for peacebuilding but lack a deep exploration of the structural and cultural challenges that hinder Nigerian youth from participating fully in diplomacy and conflict resolution. Furthermore, the success factors of specific youth-led initiatives in Nigeria and their adaptability to other conflict-prone regions remain under-researched. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how Nigerian youth can be further empowered to foster sustainable peace and stability, thereby contributing to the growing body of knowledge on youth engagement in peace processes.

Research Methodology
The research methodology for this study on the role of youth in promoting peace and diplomacy in Nigeria will combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather comprehensive insights. This mixed-methods approach will allow for a more in-depth understanding of youth involvement in peacebuilding and diplomacy, as well as the challenges they face and the impact of their efforts.

Research Design
This study will employ an exploratory research design, focusing on understanding the current roles of youth in peace and diplomacy in Nigeria. The design will include both qualitative and quantitative components to gather diverse perspectives and in-depth information.

Population and Sampling
Population:
The target population for this study includes Nigerian youth between the ages of 15 and 35, peacebuilding practitioners, youth organizations, government officials involved in peace and diplomacy, and experts in conflict resolution. This broad demographic is intended to capture a wide range of views and experiences.

Sampling Technique:
A purposive sampling technique will be used to select key informants, such as youth leaders, activists, and professionals involved in peace and diplomacy. Additionally, stratified random sampling will be employed to ensure representation from different ethnic, religious, and

geographic backgrounds in Nigeria. This stratification ensures diversity in the data collected, as youth from different regions and social contexts may experience peacebuilding differently.

Sample Size:
Approximately, 150 youth participants will be targeted for the quantitative survey. For the qualitative portion, approximately 20 participants, including youth leaders, NGO representatives, and peacebuilding experts, will be selected for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection:
A structured questionnaire will be administered to youth participants to gather data on their involvement in peace and diplomacy initiatives. The questionnaire will be designed to collect information on the following:
Levels of youth participation in peacebuilding and diplomatic activities.
Perceived barriers to youth involvement in peace processes.
The impact of youth-led peace initiatives on conflict resolution.
Suggestions for improving youth engagement in diplomacy and peacebuilding.
The questionnaire will include both closed and Likert-scale questions to quantify youth experiences, perceptions, and attitudes.

Qualitative Data Collection:
Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants, including youth activists, leaders of peace organizations, government officials, and peacebuilding practitioners. The interviews will explore:
The challenges faced by youth in promoting peace and diplomacy.
Success stories of youth-led initiatives and how they have impacted communities.
Institutional frameworks supporting or limiting youth participation.
Insights into how to improve youth engagement in peace and diplomacy.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) will also be conducted with selected groups of youth to gain a collective understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The FGDs will allow for dynamic discussions and generate ideas about youth roles in peacebuilding.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis:
The quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize key trends and patterns. Frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations will be used to explore the demographic and geographic variations in youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests, will be conducted to examine the relationships between variables (e.g., education level, region, and youth involvement in peace initiatives).

Qualitative Data Analysis:
The qualitative data from interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher will identify recurring themes and patterns related to the barriers, challenges, and successes of youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Key themes

will include youth empowerment, institutional barriers, and the effectiveness of youth-led peace efforts. NVivo software may be used to help organize and code qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be sought from the appropriate institutional review board before the commencement of the study. Participants in this study will receive full information about its purpose and will provide informed consent prior to participation, with the right to withdraw at any time. Their privacy will be safeguarded, with personal information kept confidential and anonymity maintained through the use of codes or pseudonyms. In line with the principle of non-maleficence, the study will prioritize participants' well-being, ensuring that discussions, particularly on sensitive topics of conflict and violence, are conducted respectfully to prevent any emotional or psychological harm.

Limitations of the Study

This study will focus on youth within Nigeria, so findings may not apply to Nigerian youth in the diaspora who might engage differently in peace and diplomacy. Response bias could arise, as some participants may give socially acceptable answers on sensitive issues; however, anonymity and clear instructions will help mitigate this. Additionally, time constraints may limit data collection from all regions, particularly in conflict-prone areas with restricted access. Through a mixed-methods approach of surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, the study aims to offer an in-depth view of Nigerian youth's involvement in peacebuilding, showcasing both their challenges and their potential to foster sustainable peace in Nigeria.

Discussion:

Given that the data will be collected later, this discussion will focus on the expected outcomes rather than offering an in-depth analysis based on uncollected data. The discussion will outline the types of data anticipated, based on preliminary research, to guide the study of youth engagement in peacebuilding and diplomacy in Nigeria. The study anticipates that Nigerian youth-led peace initiatives, particularly in conflict-prone areas like the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt, have made significant contributions to peacebuilding efforts, focusing on conflict resolution, environmental justice, and community reconciliation. By analyzing the success of these programs, the research expects to showcase how young Nigerians, who comprise over 60% of the population, bring innovative ideas and enthusiasm to peace efforts when given the support they need. This data will provide a clear picture of youth as active change agents capable of driving sustainable peace in regions affected by long standing conflicts.

However, the study also expects to uncover numerous challenges that hinder youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Socio-political, economic, and cultural barriers, such as marginalization from decision-making, unemployment, lack of education, and traditions that favor elder leadership, often restrict young people's involvement. The anticipated data will likely highlight the lack of institutional support for youth-led initiatives, underscoring the need for more infrastructure and resources to facilitate youth engagement. At the same time, the research aims to identify opportunities, such as capacity-building programs and campaigns like "Not Too Young to Run," which have already started enhancing youth participation in governance. Evidence from these findings may support the creation of formal platforms for

youth representation in peace negotiations, ultimately helping to amplify their role in both national and international diplomacy.

Conclusion

The conclusion will integrate the anticipated data outcomes, providing insights without drawing final conclusions at this preliminary stage. Expected results suggest that youth-led peace initiatives, especially in conflict areas like the Niger Delta and Middle Belt, are likely to have a positive impact on conflict resolution, highlighting the benefits of empowering young people in peacebuilding efforts. Anticipated findings also include evidence of significant socio-political, economic, and cultural barriers that limit youth participation, shedding light on the challenges of youth marginalization, economic constraints, and cultural resistance. The study expects to uncover effective strategies for youth empowerment, such as leadership development and conflict resolution programs, which could lead to policy recommendations for formal youth engagement platforms like advisory councils and peace ambassadorships. Additionally, anticipated data may link increased youth involvement in peace processes to long-term national stability, supporting the view that youth engagement is crucial for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

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Keywords: Meaningful Dialogue, Peace, Marginalization, aforementioned.