

Building Peace from the Grassroots with Informal Peace Infrastructures: Experiences from the Ojoo Community, Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

One of the greatest resources for promoting peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in people and their culture. Bearing this in mind is a major step towards addressing domestic violence, intimate partner violence, disputes over land ownership and challenges associated with weak social cohesion that plague Ibadan, Nigeria. This study explores the contributions of informal peace committees (IPCs) as informal peace infrastructures (IPIs) in responding to the menace and powering peacebuilding from below in the local setting of Ojoo, Ibadan, where the study was conducted. The qualitative study adopts participatory action research design. It uses purposive sampling techniques and sourced primary data from individual interviews, focus group discussions, observation and diarising. Twenty respondents were interviewed and three focus group discussions were conducted for the study with a view to collecting primary data. Although IPIs also have their own weaknesses, the study revealed that local peace infrastructures, such as IPCs are resourceful and effective in addressing multiple threats, including domestic and intimate partner violence, disputes over land ownership, weak social cohesion and building peace from below. The study further revealed that IPCs can be sustainable if established through collaborative efforts in the affected community at a grassroots level with a sense of shared ownership, feelings of inclusiveness and project legitimacy.

Keywords: Building, Peace, Grassroots, Informal Peace Infrastructure, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Many conflicts, be it conflicts at societal, state or global scale, are rooted in grassroots or local contexts and take place at the individual level. To address conflicts without giving adequate attention to people at the grassroots level can pose a challenge to conflict resolution. Peace-enhancing structures at grassroots level often offer adequate attention to conflicts rooted in the local context. Sangqu (2014:424) notes that IPCs are “classic examples of peace-enhancing structures because of their focus on building peace” from below. IPCs are set up by communities affected by conflicts with a view to advancing their common interests (Chivasa and Harris, 2019).

As local peace infrastructures, informal peace committees embrace cultural and grassroots mechanisms, which are important steps in building peace from the ground up. This is the reason it is important for conflict managers and conflict parties to pay attention to cultural and other grassroots dynamics. Nganje (2014) corroborates this when he argues that parties endeavour to grasp the cultural component of conflict, and identify the instruments for tackling conflict that exist within that cultural context. Exploring cultural resources is one viable option for achieving the expected result. As pointed out by IGI Global (2023:1), “cultural resources are cultural values, rites, norms or actions which lead in a subculture to a common understanding and which can be used to legitimize meanings, interpretations, and actions”. Thus, building on cultural resources and using other local mechanisms for handling disputes can be quite effective in resolving conflicts and transforming relationships (Maiese, 2003).

IPCs are not based on cultural resources alone, but are hybrid formations that combine indigenous and cosmopolitan values and norms. Colona and Jaffe (2016:1) define hybrid governance arrangements as “those in which non-state actors take on functions classically attributed to the state and, in the process, become entangled with formal state actors and agencies to the extent that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between state and non-state”. Furthermore, Kioko (2017) argues that hybrid governance arrangements are gaining popularity in development debates, particularly in the governance of (common-pool) resources, and in peacebuilding/conflict resolution in the world, especially in Africa.

In Africa, many conflicts often revolve around struggle to control mineral resources and political power. Williams (2017:35) notes that “most of the nonstate armed conflicts in Africa revolve around struggles to secure local

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sources of livelihood, notably issues connected to water, land, and livestock”. In addition, conflicts against women, including domestic and intimate partner violence, have also taken centre stage in many African countries. For instance, in Ibadan, Nigeria, the problem of domestic and intimate partner violence is alarming. According to a recent study by Adedokun et al (2019), about one in three women in Ibadan have experienced physical violence from their partners. In addition, Otto et al (2020), reveal that about one in five women in Ibadan have experienced sexual violence. Furthermore, a study by Okedare and Fawole (2023) found that intimate partners’ violence (IPV) is common among young women in Ibadan, and higher among women in slum communities. Also, trading-related violence against market women is also not left out among many violent experiences in Ibadan. According to Odeyemi (2016), market women in Ibadan are at risk of physical, sexual and psychological violence from a variety of sources, including their spouses, customers and co-workers.

Bad leadership in many African countries, including Nigeria, exacerbates conditions of human insecurity and violence in many countries on the continent. Galtung (1969) pointed out three types of violence: direct, indirect and cultural violence, all of which abound and interplay on the continent. He describes direct violence as violent behaviour or acts of aggression that threaten, injure or kill the victim; indirect or structural violence as the violence built into the social system, and cultural violence as the attitudes or beliefs used to legitimise direct or structural violence. Africa seems to be overburdened by all three types of violence, and the contribution of local peace infrastructure in addressing this menace cannot be underestimated.

Candid efforts towards dealing with all forms of violence, whether direct, structural or cultural, would involve a collaborative approach of top-down and bottom-up peace infrastructures. In fact, factors contributing to violence, be they attitudinal or behavioural factors, or factors relating to the broader socio-economic, cultural and political conditions, can be altered (World Health Organization, 2002). Infrastructures for peace (I4P) can play a key role in altering these factors.

Although local peace infrastructures (LPIs), whether formal or informal, have their own weaknesses, there are success stories of local peace committees (LPCs) in Kenya, South Africa, districts in the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and Uganda, among others (Adan and Pkalya, 2006:3; Van-Tongeren, 2012:108; 2013:41–51).

It is against this backdrop that this study explores the concept of local peace infrastructures and the contribution of informal peace committees to building peace from the grassroots in a semi-urban location in Ibadan.

2. Infrastructures for peace

In today's world, peace infrastructures have become one of the main ways in which peacebuilders aim to achieve their typically wide variety of highly political goals such as local security, the extension of state authority, and the restoration or establishment of rule of law (Bachmann and Schouten, 2018). The idea of I4P emerged in the peacebuilding literature of the 1990s along with the shift of focus from conflict resolution to conflict transformation. Johan Galtung's original concept of I4P are still based on the search for structures that can eliminate causes of war and provide an alternative in a situation of war (Kovács, 2020). The idea is regarded as an alternative peacebuilding approach with the potential to transform the power dynamics inherent in and harness the positive aspects of the relationship between local, state and international actors to address conflicts on all fronts (Nganje, 2021).

I4P are institutional structures or mechanisms for preventing and addressing conflicts at local, regional, national and global level (Van-Tongeren, 2011). They are networks of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society (Kovács and Tobias, 2016). They may be created to mediate intra-state or intra-communal violence. Through harnessing local resources, peace infrastructures can enable communities to resolve conflicts using a problem-solving approach (Irene, 2014).

I4P acts through dialogue, mutual understanding and trust-building. It embraces an inclusive and constructive problem-solving approach, and joint action to prevent violence (Odendaal, 2010). This is crucial to planning peace. Hopp-Nishanka (2012) argues that I4Ps give peace address due to their nature as standing peace structures. They transcend the small-scale approach to peacebuilding, peace trainings and peace activities and effect a large-scale more effective and long term approach that involves sustainable peace architecture.

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Proponents of I4P argue that it affords local actors and communities the opportunity to call on political and infrastructural resources at national [and international] levels, while still rooting their peacebuilding initiatives in the relevant local context, history and culture (Odendaal, 2010).

I4P can be top-down or bottom-up. The top-down include ministries of peace, national peace councils, national peace committees, peace commissions and other formal peace structures created by states through legislation, proclamations or other related ways in which governments establish structures. The National Peace Council in Ghana and the Ministry of Peace in Ethiopia established in 2018 are examples of top-down peace infrastructures in Africa. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2010), the National Peace Council was initiated in 2005 by the UNDP to promote community dialogue and raise early warning on potential conflicts. Other top-down peace infrastructures in the world include the Ministry of National Unity; Reconciliation and Peace established in the Solomon Islands in 2002 and renamed in 2019 as the Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs; the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal established in 2007; and the Ministry of Peace and Justice established in Costa Rica in 2009.

Bottom-up peace infrastructures are often “local agencies that result in community members working together to unite, participate and form peacebuilding committees” (Chivasa, 2023:1). Their names vary from local peace committees to informal peace clubs and community peace centres. In addition, they include local resources of all forms that are designed for violence prevention, peace-making, conflict management, resolution and transformation and peacebuilding. The Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya, the Collaborative in South Kordofan in Sudan, Baraza Inter-Communicative in North Kivu in the DRC and the Kibimba Peace Committee in Burundi are examples of bottom-up infrastructures in Africa.

Overall, I4P have recorded positive results in mitigating and tackling different types of conflict and violence, including election-related violence. Kumar and Haye (2011), for instance, linked peaceful electoral outcomes to United Nations (UN)-backed initiatives in Guyana in 2006, Ghana in 2004 and 2008, Sierra Leone in 2007, Togo in 2010, Kyrgyzstan in 2010, Solomon Islands in 2010 and the constitutional referendum in Kenya in 2010. The UN-backed initiatives developed I4P which were

aimed at strengthening national capacities for conflict prevention and transformation. Nevertheless, they also had challenges and, in some instances, failed to stop violence.

2.1 Three examples of infrastructures for peace in Africa

2.1.1 Kenya

The effort to formalise grassroots-level peacebuilding initiatives was prompted by the severity of conflicts in Kenya's pastoralist and agro-pastoralist community in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Adan and Pkalya (2006) posit, the realisation that community members themselves were better placed to manage their own conflicts necessitated the need for I4P. They added that inaccessibility of the formal judicial system and lack of trust in government led to conflict prevention interventions using I4P. The government's failure to provide security and justice, and its inability to address communal issues, laid the groundwork for informal peace committees in Kenya. This was made worse by the fact that many of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kenyan districts had left. However, the NGOs' withdrawal from the district turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it allowed the local population to take initiative on their own (Juma, 2000).

Informal peace committees in Kenya were established, among other things, to deal with inter-ethnic conflicts and cattle rustling in the Rift Valley (Odendaal and Olivie 2008). The situation in Kenya is typical of a bottom-up approach to creating peace infrastructures. The post-election violence in 2007 led to the recommendation by the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 to establish district peace committees in all Kenyan districts. During the conflicts, there was less violence in districts that already had peace committees as a result of the Wajir District Women Group Initiatives.

In fact, the first informal peace committee (IPC) in Kenya was the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC). The Wajir peace-building experience between Degodia and Ngare clans was led by a woman, and contributed in no small measure to the basis for the creation of the IPCs in Kenya. According to Kioko (2017:4-5), IPCs came in the "wake of legitimate concerns" and "took shape mainly after the atrocities committed during the 2007–2008 post-election". The WPDC process was entirely owned by and driven at a grassroots level, and it was largely successful (Odendaal, 2010). Civil society actors, elders from various

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clans, district commissioners and parliamentarians collaborated in the creation of the WPDC. The Wajir Peace Initiatives were incorporated into the district development committee and eventually evolved into the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (Van-Tongeren 2012). It was chaired by the district commissioner. WPDC's expansion to the northern part of Kenya was facilitated by the model of its formation and success.

Following this, the government and civil society organisations saw an opportunity to establish, emphasise and promote local peace institutions. Wachira, Arendshorst and Charles (2010) emphasise the significance of promoting local capacities for peacebuilding. The Kenyan government made the decision in 2001 to set up the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management. In 2004, the President's office used the National Steering Committee to start the process of developing a peacebuilding and conflict management policy.

2.1.2 Ghana

Within the rationale for establishing a national I4P in Ghana, as argued by van-Tongeren (2011), was the need to gravitate towards the use of a cooperative, non-violent and dialogue-based approach that involved all stakeholders in conflict resolution; as well as to develop culturally appropriate institutional mechanisms to promote and manage this approach at district, national and local levels. An in-depth examination of Ghana's experience reveals that the need to end a devastating violent conflict typically led to the establishment of only a few I4Ps.

The northern region of Ghana saw 23 conflicts between the 1980s and 2000, culminating in the 2002 killing of the King of Dagbon and some of his elders. The affected region was placed under a state of emergency by the government, which then urged the UN member states to assist her. The UNDP responded by appointing a Peace and Governance Advisor to intervene and assist in putting an end to the violent outbreak (Odendaal, 2010). This development could be considered the beginning of the journey towards the establishment of I4P in Ghana. In May 2006, the National Peace Council (NPC) was established in Ghana with UNDP support.

The body played a crucial role in ensuring that Ghana's 2008 election was peaceful and that the transfer of power went smoothly. According to Odendaal (2010), Ghana's national peace architecture became the first official African national programme for peacebuilding. It aligned with the

resolution of African leaders at the 2002 First Standing Conference on Stability, Security, and Development in Africa. It proposed a resolution that each country establishes a national framework to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts. Ghana's national peace architecture became the first official African national programme for peacebuilding.

In addition to its national infrastructure, Ghana also established a District Peace Advisory Council. According to Ojielo (2007), Ghana's decision to implement the District Peace Advisory Council was influenced more by her experience with a few intractable community-based and inter-ethnic conflicts than by a crisis in governance (especially not at the national level). The frontiers of peace committees expanded to include their use in maintaining peace even in areas that appeared to be peaceful, due to a growing understanding of the concept and effectiveness of peace committees. Ghana is a clear illustration of the interconnectedness of national and local conflict systems. The NPC's contribution to ensuring a peaceful election in 2008 and the smooth transfer of power in Ghana remain one of its most significant effects.

2.1.3 South Africa

The National Peace Accord (NPA) was born out of a desire to put an end to the escalating violence which was occurring in the period between the announcement of the end of apartheid in 1989 and the first democratic elections in 1994 (Irene, 2014). As part of the National Peace Accord agreement in 1991, formal peace committees were established throughout the country. The peace structures that were established to implement the Accord include the National Peace Committee and Secretariat, 11 regional peace committees, 263 formal peace committees and more than 18 000 peace monitors (Carmichael, 2022). Carmichael added that the "silent majority" was mobilised by the National Peace Campaign, which was established under the NPA and gave peace an unprecedented grassroots identity and legitimacy. She continued by arguing that the formulation of the NPA by political representatives, church and business facilitators brought an end to the political impasse. This marked South Africa's first encounter with multi-party negotiations and made it possible to begin discussions about the constitution.

During the year prior to the 1994 elections, confidence was high that South Africa had successfully pioneered a peace structure which had laid the foundation for peaceful electioneering processes in the country. At the

local and regional levels, the country developed mechanisms to effectively halt a rise in violence. Even though political violence caused 2649 deaths in South Africa in the final days of the apartheid struggle in 1992 and 3567 deaths in 1994 (Van-Togeren, 2013), all observers agreed that formal peace committees successfully prevented several potentially violent events by encouraging local dialogue and problem-solving processes. The role of formal peace committees in conflict intervention contributed to the political future of South Africa, including the 1994 end of apartheid.

3. Local peace committees (formal and informal)

The rise of local peace committees as mechanisms for grassroots peacebuilding in the 21st century could be traced to the early 1980s with John Paul Lederach playing a key role in popularising the entire idea of infrastructures for peace. The concept gained prominence in the 1990s following the argument that local communities affected by violent conflict be recognised as resources, and not just recipients of peacebuilding efforts that were largely driven from the outside (Lederach, 1997). In addition, it was argued that communities affected by violent conflict had greater incentives than any external actor to resolve such conflict, and were better positioned to build and sustain peace through their intimate knowledge of the local culture as well as community relations and dynamics (Lederach, 1997).

There are two main categories of local peace committees – formal and informal peace committees. A formal peace committee is one created by the state through a national peace accord, legislation or a formal statutory body as part of its mandate. IPCs are often established by members of a civil society or community members. Chivasa (2019) opines that “formal peace committees (FPCs) are structures whose members are official representatives of sides to the conflict, with official mandate from a piece of legislation and, in contrast, IPCs are a replica, but whose members are volunteers from all walks of life in the community in question and with no official mandate from a piece of legislation”. Adan and Pkalya (2006) conceive local peace committees (formal and informal) as conflict intervention structures that integrate both traditional and modern conflict intervention mechanisms to prevent and manage or transform intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic conflicts. They defined this as a conflict mitigation and peacebuilding structure which integrates traditional and modern conflict interventions to address intra- and inter-tribal tensions and conflicts and/or a community-based structure and initiative to

prevent, manage and transform intra- and inter-community conflicts. A working definition from a workshop put together in June 2005 by the NSC and Oxfam GB in Nanyuki, Kenya defined local peace committees (FPCs and IPCs) as groups of people whose broad job was to define parameters for peace.

Chivasa and Harris (2019:1) further argue that informal peace committees are “community-based responsive and supportive mechanisms that deal with social issues such as interpersonal conflicts, small-scale violence, poverty, hunger and social injustice”. As local peace infrastructures, formal and informal peace committees are established using both traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms and for the purposes of peace-making and peacebuilding. They are envisioned as organic, inclusive and participatory standing peace structures that use a problem-solving approach to address conflicts. Tsuma et al (2014) opine that they serve as instruments for strengthening social cohesion and promoting the resilience of local communities. By so doing, they contribute towards the attainment of sustainable peace beyond the immediate local environment. As reported by Nganje (2021), these peace committees were used to halt the 2019–2020 xenophobic unrest episodes in South Africa, as they played a major role in alerting the police and relevant authorities to potential attacks, and also mobilised communities to protect foreigners and their properties. These are mechanisms suitable for building peace at the grassroots level, even under challenging circumstances. As further revealed by Chivasa (2023:1), informal peace committees “have a close relationship with developmental social intervention strategies that seek to deal with development challenges such as poverty, inequality and violence, and the major one, community development”.

The inherent ability of FPCs and IPCs to build trust and confidence at community levels makes it essential in personal transformation and in the transformation of potential actors. According to Hopp-Nishanka (2012), LPCs (FPCs & IPCs) bring stakeholders, their constituencies and change agents together, and create space for joint problem-solving, thus creating, consolidating and maintaining a network of transformative actors. It allows various representatives of the community to take responsibility for and participate in addressing their problems. This corroborates Chivasa’s (2021:1) argument that it allows “ordinary people who have little influence over their lives to tackle difference, injustices and peace issues between men, woman and youths” and, as revealed by Muchanyuka

(2020), IPCs have the potential to set in place an early warning system to mitigate violence which occurs at community levels.

Unlike the traditional structure, local peace committees (FPCs and IPCs) recruit members from various community representations, including elders, women, youths, civil society groups, community organisations, political leaders, government and foreigners. The qualities to be considered in selecting people into informal peace committees include honesty, integrity, impartiality, neutrality and fluency in the local language. In addition, such persons must be knowledgeable, of local residency, a non-political office holder, and they should be accessible and available (Adan and Pkalya, 2006).

Local peace committees (FPCs & IPCs) are inclusive and present a superior structure that values and recognises the role and contributions of various groups within the community (Irene, 2014). Whereas successive structured steps and criteria, such as age system or kinship/clan, often define the membership of traditional structures, informal peace committees manage a selection process of representatives from different groups in the community. Adan and Pkalya (2006) posit that this approach helps to widen the composition of formal and informal peace committees with the cumulative effect being the emergence of all-inclusive peacebuilding structure/approach/process.

According to Van-Tongeren (2013), memberships of IPCs often comprise volunteers with high passion and interest in peace. In addition, members show greater commitment and creativity than members of formal local peace committees. They resonate well with the grassroots and local resources and have been found effective in dealing with conflicts and building peace from the ground up. Although they are not without challenges, as noted by Muchanyuka (2020), they may experience a lack of adequate financial resources, initial resistance, and suspicions from community members and state authority.

4. Methods

The study involved qualitative research which adopted a participatory action research (PAR) approach and informal procedures to establish an informal peace committee (IPC) in a local setting in Ojoo, Ibadan, Nigeria. As an ancient city, Ibadan is characterised by urban, semi-urban and rural suburb settings. Ojoo local community was purposely selected for the study against the backdrop of its history of conflict and violence,

particularly over land and resources. In recent years, some of the most common conflicts have included disputes over land ownership, domestic and intimate partner violence, trader-related violence (market men or women), road transport worker-related violence, farmer-herdsmen violence and violence relating to the activities of cult groups. In addition, there have been reports of increasing crime rates, including armed robbery and assault (Onokala, 2017). As a Yoruba people, the Yoruba culture and tradition holds sway in the location, and community members are mostly linked by Yoruba language, norms, values, kin and tradition. The population of study cut across all age groups and other social characteristics in Ojoo community, Ibadan.

PAR design was deployed because it resonates with peacebuilding, and it is believed to be very appropriate for the study due to its relationship with peacebuilding. As opined by Chivasa (2017), PAR and peacebuilding bring individuals together with a view to addressing a common social problem; they are relationship oriented. He further argues that peacebuilding acknowledges peace as not an accidental experience. It requires planning, as pointed out by Hopp-Nishanka (2012). It also requires commitment and participation of relevant stakeholders and cooperative relationship. These are all critical components of PAR.

PAR is useful in linking research to the action required to bring about social change. PAR is essential to this study because it has, at its core, trust, networks and social justice. These are important values that underpin both PAR and peacebuilding; they remain major components of peaceful communities (Van Niekerk and Van Niekerk, 2009). Members of the community participated from the design stage through to the evaluation of their own activities. A study by Chivasa (2021) revealed that taking responsibility for the design and establishing peace committees by the grassroots, help in the development of variables that facilitate participatory peacebuilding, because of shared commitments and equitable inclusion between the social groups and areas or sectors that are involved. He added that participatory peacebuilding enables local individuals who have small influence over their lives to handle issues relating to peace, injustices and differences between men, women, and youth. Furthermore, Chivasa (2021) found out that the key components that facilitate participatory peacebuilding incorporate an equivalent share of responsibilities and collaboration between men, women, and the young

in the plan and creation of peace committees, and allow women to occupy major positions within the structures of informal peace committees.

For this study, PAR meant that local members of the community participated in the design and creation of the informal peace committees. PAR is a process of continuous cycles, where each cycle reflects the PAR principles. The components or stages of the cyclical process of PAR are diagnosing, planning, taking action, observing, reflecting and re-planning.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique in selecting members of the PAR team, which was made up of volunteers from members of the community for the study. Interest and commitment to peace work were leading criteria that guided the selection process into the PAR from among the volunteers. Other factors considered were honesty, social group representation and willingness to commit time to the project. Seven volunteer members who are members of the local community were selected for the study and the researcher constituted the PAR team during the first cycle of the participatory action research. For this study, the process went through PAR cyclical processes twice. Before starting the second PAR cycle, seven more volunteers joined the PAR team. This increased the PAR team to 14 volunteers (self-selected members). The need to increase the number was pointed out during the observation stage of the first PAR cycle. The PAR team (14 members) co-diagnosed the problem, co-planned, co-implemented, co-observed, co-reflected and co-re-planned in line with the PAR cyclical approach.

Prior to the commencement of the second PAR cycle, a three-day workshop was organised for members with a view to adding value to their indigenous conflict resolution skills and building their capacity to a contemporary approach. In short, the workshop was designed to build their capacity in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and deepen their insight into the concept and operation of IPCs. The need for this was pointed out after the first cycle of the PAR. Observation, diarising, interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect primary data for the study. Data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis.

The demographic information of participants included 14 PAR team members and six non-PAR members (domestic conflict parties). There were nine females and 11 males. The age range of the participants was 19 to 70 years. Many of the participants are educated holders of diploma, national certificate of education (NCE), high school certificate, chartered accountancy, bachelor and masters certificates, but there were also lesser-

educated (with no certificate) and high school students among the participants. Among the participants were married, single, separated and divorced people. Also, among the participants were teachers, public servants, administrators, accountants, self-employed, clergy (pastor and Imam), estate agents/consultants, retired persons, housewives and unemployed persons including students.

The research questions for the study were guided by the research problem which led to the specific objectives: to establish an IPC in Ojoo, Ibadan, Nigeria; to assess the effectiveness of IPC in addressing conflicts and building peace in the local community; to explore how IPC can be promoted in the local community for the study; and to examine how IPC sustainability can be achieved in the local community. The PAR team co-prepared the questions used for the individual interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) in line with the aforementioned specific objectives of the study. The PAR team co-prepared these (research objectives and research questions) in line with the PAR approach. Three focus group discussions were carried out. Two of the three FGDs had seven members, and the third group had six members. Individual members interviewed also constituted the FGD members. Fourteen of them were members of the PAR and are also members of the community while six were non-PAR members who are also members of the community, and had direct dealings with the established IPC following their cases brought before the IPC.

The interviewees and members of the FGD were selected from the PAR team (also members of the community) and other community members who brought their cases before the IPC. The interviewees were asked questions that constituted the research question, and related to the specific objectives of this study. The same constituted the topics for the FGD. The respondents addressed the following questions: Is IPC a structure you are willing to establish to address conflict and violence in your area? Do you think the IPC was effective in respect to its objectives? Are you willing to promote IPC in the study area? How will IPC sustainability be assured in your area?

Thematic content analysis was the method used in analysing the primary data collected for the study as it was suitable for the analysis of qualitative data. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the classifications and present themes (patterns) that related to the data. A collaborative approach was also deployed in selecting the themes following the data

from the interview and FGDs. Similar themes were obtained from both sections (individual interviews and FGDs) mostly due to the fact that the same respondents who participated in the individual interviews also broke into three different groups for FGDs. Additionally, they were guided by the same topics and questions as was the case in individual interviews.

The identification of themes for discussion was effected via a coding technique developed in line with Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) advising that letters or symbols could be used to represent data in the form of codes. The themes that emerged were LPC establishment, LPC effectiveness, LPC promotion and LPC sustainability. Themes that occurred more frequently were considered to be major themes.

For validity and reliability, triangulation, including the use of participants checking, preliminary activities that served as a pilot programme, and prolonged presence in the site of research were deployed as strategies. Individual interview and FGD questions were prepared in line with the aforementioned specific objectives by the PAR team, and presented to two experts and senior researchers in the field of peace and conflict study for review, criticism and validation. Their criticism and modifications were implemented while producing the final draft of the interview guide. In addition, for data validation purposes from participants, the researcher checked on members for clarification on issues that seemed inconclusive, unclear or that required emphasis.

One of the ways of finding out whether, for example, an observation is 'valid' is to ask other people, especially the research participants, and check whether the participants agree with the researcher's data (Creswell, 2014). This was one of the strategies adopted in this study. The giving of clear instructions to participants and respondents as well as not asking questions that required long explanations contributed to the reduction of fatigue and attention deficit for those interviewed. Participants agreed with the researcher's data, which established the reliability of the study.

The research was carried out in accordance with ethical guidelines. Ethical consideration was a priority in this study. There was voluntary participation of individuals in the interview sessions. Individuals who participated in this research work were not forced into it. Privacy and anonymity of participants were also given paramount importance in this study. The consent of the informants was sought to have their responses recorded for easy analysis. Participants were assured that the purpose of

the data collection exercise was strictly academic. Furthermore, works of authors used for the research were duly acknowledged.

5. Results

An IPC was established in a local setting in Ojoo area in Ibadan, Nigeria following this study. The IPC was used to address dispute over land ownership, domestic and intimate partner violence and it promoted a social cohesion programmer. The data for the study were analysed along various themes as seen below:

5.1 IPC establishment

An IPC was established in a local setting in Ojoo area in Ibadan, through an informal procedure and volunteer methods. During the FGDs and individual interviews, many respondents argued that the creation of the IPC required collaboration among stakeholders. They said the IPC creation could be done through research, through community outsider(s) and/or insiders' motivated actions. In all of these, respondents said the best was insiders' motivated actions. If it is something the insiders (local community members) think they want, the insiders would be motivated by the spirit of local ownership, and this would contribute to making the creation and running of the IPC more effective. In this study, this was taken into consideration. Local people took ownership of it. They saw it as what they thought would work in addressing the problem of domestic and intimate partner violence, violence against pregnant women and weak social cohesion, and in building peace in their community. A respondent commented, which also captured the views of many respondents, and corroborates the aforesaid point when he said:

We are really now happy to be part of this project of creating IPC in this our community because we are convinced that it is the right approach to deal with conflicts and violence that are prevalent in this community (especially domestic and intimate partner violence, dispute over land ownership) and in building sustainable peace. (Seg, 2023)

Another respondent added that following his experience in this project, he believed that:

Self-initiated IPCs are less expensive. This is due to the fact that they make use of community resources which often include free manpower, free venue, and easier mobilisation of volunteers or people

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to select into IPC, including flexible time arrangement and local fundraising (no matter how small) even if it's for refreshment of IPC members when addressing conflict cases during meetings. (Iwe, 2023)

The above comments follow Odendaal's (2010) argument on legitimacy as a critical consideration in setting up a local peace committee. IPCs must enjoy local legitimacy, and legitimacy often flows from ownership. When it is available, it makes the local community members double or multiply their commitment to the IPC. Interest and commitment to peace work are the key motivations for joining informal peace committees. The acceptability of the IPC becomes very high among local community members.

Community members who volunteered or were appointed into the IPC membership had to be impartial persons whose honesty, integrity, credibility and attitudes were impressive. In addition, they had to be knowledgeable on what they were expected to do. Community leaders and the indigenous community members in both local and semi-urban settings, knew the track records and antecedents of many indigenous people in the area. They were able to draw on these resources to determine the qualifications and validate persons appointed into the IPC or who volunteered to join. The establishment of IPCs often involves the selection of capable individuals representing different sectors and social divides of the community. The representation of all social groups or constituencies found in the community, including vulnerable groups such as youth and women, offers local peace committees a platform that is conducive to creating co-existence and cohesion (Chivasa, 2017) in local communities. The IPC members often undergo relevant trainings with a view to building their capacity and to empower them to carry out the IPC activities effectively and efficiently.

5.2 IPC effectiveness

During individual interviews, many respondents argued that local peace committees were very effective in addressing domestic and intimate partner violence, including violence against pregnant women that appeared to be prevalent in Ibadan. It was also effective in promoting relational peace building. IPC creation could be a preventative measure (through local early warning signal mechanisms and nipping conflict at latent stages) or in response to specific conflict cases. Overall, IPCs

promote peacebuilding at grassroots level. Many conflicts and violence that manifest at national level are also entwined with local factors. Therefore, it is important for national level governments to formulate and encourage policies that can promote formal and informal peace committees in communities. Many respondents described the IPC as more effective in addressing the root causes of conflict and in building peace than other approaches such as litigation, and even the traditional approach. Given that IPCs are often a blend of traditional and contemporary approaches, one may not want to argue the position of the respondents on IPC effectiveness. The successful intervention by the IPC in different conflicts in the community, including six domestic violence cases brought to it by six non-PAR community members, attests to the effectiveness of the IPC. The view expressed by many respondents appeared to have been summarily captured by a respondent who said:

We are glad for all we have put into this project of setting up IPC. We can see by ourselves that IPC is truly effective in addressing conflicts and violence as seen in the different conflicts the IPC intervened, such as domestic and intimate partners' violence cases, disputes over land ownership. We can see that IPC build peace on a solid foundation that can endure the test of time for conflict parties, as it addressed the needs and the root causes of conflicts. Whether as a reaction to a specific conflict or as a preventative structure, IPC is indeed effective, and its capacity to build peace from below is not in doubt. (Ama, 2023)

The comments of many respondents may very well further spotlight the inherent capacity of IPCs to build peace, especially in local communities and even in semi-urban settings in today's world. This is important amid the increasing rate of violence and state fragility, and the urgent need to stem the tides. Van-Togeren (2012) connects with this when he contends that when state fragility occurs, the creation of IPCs help communities to address peace challenges which affect their well-being. And the addressing of their well-being brings balance to such communities which, by so doing, advance their interests. Also, Odendaal (2010) and Sangqu (2014) alluded to this when they said that communities create peace committees to advance their interests. Building peace is of paramount interest to communities and IPCs are strategic to the whole engagement. IPCs build peace in local communities through creating dialogue spaces where people engage each other in search of solutions to their challenges.

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They also facilitate peacebuilding sessions. In some situations, they mediate conflict and act as early warning systems; they work towards addressing human insecurity concerns in their areas.

All the ingredients that make IPCs effective must be available, and some of these have been pointed out in studies by Lederach (1997). He points out that what makes peace committees effective is the fact that most, if not all, are situated in existing networks (involving village heads, local councillors, chiefs and other leaders), particularly those created by community members themselves. Any peace committee that uses these networks has the potential to build peace at local community levels.

All respondents from among those who brought their cases to the IPC intervention in the course of this study agreed that their conflicts were amicably resolved by the IPC created by the study. They added that what was achieved could be rightly described as positive peace among the conflict parties. They said they were satisfied with the resolution, and believed that the root causes of their conflicts had been properly addressed.

In sum, one such case was concerned with domestic violence. It involved a man who regularly returned home drunk very late at night, and often beat up his wife for her complaints regarding his behaviour. The intervention of the IPC contributed in returning peace to the home, as the man stopped returning home late and his stopped wife-beating behaviour. The IPC adopted a method that, among other methods, drew on mediation as an approach to resolve the conflict. Domestic and intimate partner violence and land ownership disputes were the cases addressed alongside advocating programmes to promote the building of social cohesion in the course of this experimental study.

One advantage of blending a traditional approach and a contemporary approach resides in the power of synergy that such IPCs brings to the fore. This truly makes the IPC strong, effective and holistic in its approach to dealing with conflicts and building peace. The comment of an informant, as seen below, which also captured the opinions of many respondents, attempts to bring clarity on the impact of the IPC when he said:

We are happy the IPC has been created and that the committee can resolve conflicts. So, we decided to come to the IPC to see how it would resolve our conflicts. We are happy we came and brought our cases here. All we say at this point, is that the IPC really did well. What

we saw was different from our experiences in previous cases we were involved in. The IPC facilitated resolution processes, also allowed us to play a major role in resolving our conflicts. What we mean is that the IPC helped us to resolve the conflicts by mediating the process. (Fide, 2023)

The above comment from a respondent revealed that parties to the conflict were satisfied with the outcome of the resolution of their conflicts. Respondents also pointed out that the IPC helped to facilitate the process that led to the resolution of the conflicts. There was a strong collaboration between the conflict party and the members of the IPC as they worked together towards the resolution of the conflicts. This was in line with the IPC approach which is concerned with facilitating dialogue, mediating conflicts and building consensus. These functions of IPCs allow the conflict stakeholders to play key roles in resolving their conflicts. In short, IPC helps the conflict parties to address the root causes of the conflicts.

5.3 IPC promotion

Promoting IPCs in local communities can flow from IPC legitimacy. When respondents were asked if an IPC was something they were willing to promote in their community, all the respondents said yes. They added that they were happy to share the idea with neighbouring communities and support promoting IPCs even in those areas. They continued, saying that they had seen that IPCs would be useful in dealing with conflicts and violence and in building peace in their community. Their willingness to promote the IPC was an important step in the realisation of my desire for the establishment of more IPCs in the community. This would help reduce pressure on a single committee, given the prevalence of conflicts in the community, and the need to build peace as soon as possible. The extent of members' willingness to promote IPCs can be seen from their actions and commitment to the project. A participant's voice summed it up by saying:

I would like to say on behalf of my colleagues that we are glad to commit ourselves to the promotion of IPC in our domain, and even try to influence neighbouring communities to establish IPC. Personally, I love the idea, and would be very much available and support the IPC in my community with my resources. I am sure the same goes for my

colleagues, and from what we hear around, the community is happy to promote IPC in the community. (Olu, 2023)

When asked how they might promote the concept of IPC in their community, many of the respondents said it was possible, especially if the community leader was in support of the project. They added that community leaders had systems in place for supporting and promoting what they supported and approved. They continued by saying that they would continue to volunteer their time and resources to the IPC they had created. And that they were sure that a combination of individuals and collective resources of the community deployed into it would go a long way towards promoting the IPC. They would promote the IPC with their resources and continuously ensure that the support and approval of leaders was obtained at all times.

5.4 IPC sustainability

Generally, IPCs are faced with the problem of inadequate funding from external sources or outsiders. This has contributed in stifling some IPCs, and has eventually led to the folding of such IPCs. When the respondents were asked about the challenges faced regarding sustainability of IPC, given their experiences in this project, many of them pointed out that poor funding could be a major challenge for IPC sustainability. However, for many of them, even though donor support from outsiders or external sources could add value to IPCs in their local community, they argued that with their local resources support, they believed their IPC could continue to survive. The clarity of this point is seen in a respondent who remarked that:

We may not have adequate financial resources to support our IPC, but we believe as we put forward the little we have and make our non-financial resources available, such as our time, commitment, free venue for meetings, our foods and palm wine to drink during meetings, we won't have problem keeping our IPC on the sustainable path, and continue to survive. (Dam, 2023)

What was observed from the respondents relates to the benefits, such as local ownership, inclusivity and legitimacy of the IPCs. Local ownership and inclusivity are key factors for achieving legitimacy of an IPC. When a community takes ownership of an IPC, it raises the IPC stake for its legitimacy. Such a community works to mobilise local resources and

ensure the sustainability of its IPC. For IPCs to be sustainable, most respondents said that such IPCs should be set up by members of the community. They all agreed that outsiders cannot simply set up IPCs without the leaders of the community and the insiders' support. If outsiders were interested in setting up an IPC in any community, they should first obtain the approval of the community members, and also involve community members in the set-up process. The respondents in this study added that sustainability was not a problem when community members saw the IPC as part of their everyday life. This informant's remarks summed it up by saying that:

When IPC is organically developed by community members, it will run just like many other associations in the community, such as elders' forum, youth groups, women groups, traditional leaders' councils, and so on. And it will survive as the community members see it as part of their everyday life. When IPC is presented as a complementary structure to the existing structure in a community, and the people see it as partner in progress in dealing with conflicts, and in building peace, including seeing it as having a healthy relationship with the indigenous community frameworks, then it would be received by community leaders as part of the community assets, and part of everyday life of the community members. (Iwale, 2023)

One of the important points raised by an informant in the above comment is the adaptability of IPC to a community indigenous framework, since many local people often strongly uphold and cherish their indigenous tradition and local framework. Change is difficult, so whatever is going to change in local communities, existing systems often encounter resistance to this. So IPCs must be introduced to complement the existing tradition or local system that supports peace-making in the local community. This helps to increase acceptability of the IPC by the people of the community. This is very important for the sustenance of IPCs in communities.

Informal peace committees often readily resonate with community commitment to connect the IPC to the local resource base of the community. For formal peace committees, external resource support is often required for their survival. In general, whether local peace infrastructures (formal and informal peace committees) are externally or internally motivated, it cannot be denied that adequate resources are required to make them functional and sustainable.

6. Synthesis of findings and reflections

The study demonstrates the power of IPCs in building peace from the ground up using local resources, principles and philosophies of grassroots and informal agencies and initiatives. Reflecting on the power from below in peacebuilding, the study focuses on an informal peace committee created through collaborative efforts by 14 PAR members in a local setting in Ojoo, Ibadan, Nigeria. They came together to create a local peacebuilding infrastructure (informal peace committee) and used it to intervene in conflict and to promote peacebuilding. The use of the informal peace structure to resolve cases of domestic and intimate partner violence, dispute over land ownership and to build social cohesion among members of the community further added to the voices in support of IPCs and a call on communities to establish IPCs and other peace infrastructures.

Primary data were sourced from 20 respondents through individual interviews, focus group discussions and observation. Despite some of its weaknesses, many respondents expressed confidence in the capacity of an informal peace committee to significantly contribute to peacebuilding in local and semi-urban settings. They pointed out that an informal peace committee established through a collaborative approach was more effective and result-oriented in conflict intervention, peacebuilding and in promoting social cohesion. Participants added that the willingness to continuously promote informal peace committees in locations was anchored on the spirit of shared ownership and legitimacy of the informal peace structure. These serve as the pivot upon which informal peace committees sustainability can be achieved. While recognising the challenge inadequate funding can pose to IPI sustainability, the study nevertheless argued that the burden can be less if legitimacy and the spirit of shared ownership are strong. This could urge community members to strive towards ensuring that they contributed their quota towards the survival of the local peace infrastructure, even in difficult circumstances.

Overall, projects relating to informal peace committees are readily replicable. This contributes to its scientific usefulness in research and in addressing the problem of peacebuilding in Africa and the world at large.

7. Conclusion

The study shows that local peace infrastructures (as grassroots peacebuilding initiatives) are effective in addressing multiple threats in communities, including domestic and intimate partner violence and land ownership disputes. They are also effective in promoting relational peacebuilding and powering peacebuilding from below.

Moreover, there are existing studies that show the application of local peace infrastructures (formal and informal peace committees) to manage tensions during elections (as seen in Sierra Leone during the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007 and 2008), pastoral or grazing-related violence, and other social issues including structural violence at grassroots level. In the South African experience, although they were not able to prevent all violence, they were instrumental in containing the spread of violence.

Local peace infrastructures, with both informal and formal peace committees, are seen as an effective collaborative peacebuilding framework, especially at community level. They are, however, not without weaknesses. Notwithstanding, their strength in building peace contributes to their relevance in contemporary time, especially at local levels and even in semi-urban settings, as well as in forging a pluralistic understanding of peacebuilding beyond the elders-centric indigenous/ traditional approach that revolves around male elders and community leaders only.

The study established an informal peace committee. It revealed that the IPC was effective and that community members expressed willingness to promote IPCs in their domain. In addition, it revealed that IPCs are sustainable when robust in legitimacy, shared ownership and inclusiveness.

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