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Abstract (Eng)

Rivers State and the entire Niger Delta region have been an arena for decades of varying forms of conflict with enormous implications for lives and properties. This has created a perennial need to strive towards sustainable peace. This paper, thus, has two interconnected aims: to analyze the role of traditional institutions of leadership and local conflict resolution models in peacebuilding and to interrelate this with state-based approaches and potential broader implications of such interventions on conflict resolution in Nigeria. Conflict Transformation Theory was employed as the theoretical framework to highlight the import of relationships and cultural embeddedness as a path to peacebuilding. A qualitative and ethnographic approach was adopted in the study, with data drawn from a combination of 30 semi-structured interviews with local people with relevant scholarly and policy publications. Results indicate that anthropological and culture-based conceptualizations of peacebuilding instilled in local institutions including age-grade associations, reconciliation ceremonies and community discussions not only create localized legitimacy and inclusion but also cover root causes, including resource allocation and marginalization. This proved to be more effective compared to solely formal interventions. Findings further showed that these structural challenges exist such as gender exclusion, elite capture, and restricted interface as bastions to the success of anthropological peacebuilding initiatives. It finds hybrid, participatory peacebuilding approaches that combine the credibility of tradition with the replicability and procedural security of formal institutions, to be most promising. The findings and conclusion offer useful insight for improved interventions for peacebuilding in Rivers State and the broader Niger Delta region.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Der Bundesstaat Rivers sowie die gesamte Niger-Delta-Region sind seit Jahrzehnten Schauplatz unterschiedlicher Formen von Konflikten mit erheblichen Auswirkungen auf Menschenleben und Eigentum. Dies hat ein dauerhaftes Bedürfnis geschaffen, nach nachhaltigem Frieden zu streben. Diese Arbeit verfolgt daher zwei miteinander verbundene Ziele: erstens die Analyse der Rolle traditioneller Führungsinstitutionen und lokaler Konfliktlösungsmodelle im Friedensaufbau und zweitens die Verknüpfung dieser Ansätze mit staatlichen Strategien sowie die Untersuchung möglicher weiterreichender Implikationen solcher Interventionen für die Konfliktlösung in Nigeria. Als theoretischer Rahmen wurde die Konflikttransformationstheorie herangezogen, um die Bedeutung von Beziehungen und kultureller Einbettung als Weg zum Friedensaufbau hervorzuheben. Die Studie basiert auf einem qualitativen und ethnografischen Ansatz, wobei die Daten aus einer Kombination von 30 halbstrukturierten Interviews mit lokalen Akteuren sowie aus einschlägigen wissenschaftlichen und politikbezogenen Publikationen gewonnen wurden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass anthropologische und kulturbezogene Konzepte des Friedensaufbaus, die in lokalen Institutionen wie Altersgruppenverbänden, Versöhnungszeremonien und Gemeinschaftsdiskussionen verankert sind, nicht nur lokale Legitimität und Inklusion schaffen, sondern auch grundlegende Ursachen von Konflikten – darunter Ressourcenverteilung und Marginalisierung – berücksichtigen. Dies erwies sich im Vergleich zu ausschließlich formalen Interventionen als wirksamer. Die Ergebnisse zeigen jedoch auch, dass strukturelle Herausforderungen bestehen, etwa der Ausschluss von Frauen, die Vereinnahmung durch Eliten sowie eine eingeschränkte Schnittstelle zwischen lokalen und formalen Institutionen, die den Erfolg anthropologischer Friedensinitiativen begrenzen können. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass hybride, partizipative Ansätze des Friedensaufbaus, die die Glaubwürdigkeit traditioneller Strukturen mit der Reproduzierbarkeit und prozeduralen Sicherheit formaler Institutionen verbinden, am vielversprechendsten sind. Die Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerungen liefern wertvolle Erkenntnisse für die Verbesserung von Friedensinterventionen im Bundesstaat Rivers und in der weiteren Niger-Delta-Region.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multilingual state with over 250 ethnic groups and at least 400 languages. All these groups have their traditional leadership structures, local norms, and long-established ways of settling conflicts. In the past, these indigenous structures have played a key role in ensuring peace in communities (Habiba, 2018). This changed over time, as colonial rule was imposed, formal legal systems spread, and forces of modernization brought pressure to bear, in many cases undermining the dominance of traditional dispute resolution. With these changes in place, they started to generate the necessity of hybrid peace-building approaches that purposefully integrate indigenous approaches with state-based systems (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

It is against this changing peace-building landscape that anthropological approaches have retained their relevance, especially in discourses framing them as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. These strategies focus on the fact that cultural norms, local customs, and community structures are key factors in conflict prevention and management. They are deeply embedded in the lives of the people by appealing to the authority of respected elders, basing their decisions on customary laws, and incorporating symbolic acts of reconciliation. This embeddedness makes them legitimate and provides them with a reach that many purely formal systems lack. They are especially useful in rural and indigenous contexts, where methods like mediation by elders, third-party arbitration, and rituals of reconciliation in the presence of the community always lead to long-lasting solutions (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Conversely, most of the conflict resolution models that are of Western origin have failed to involve local stakeholders in an effective manner, but indigenous systems build trust, collective

responsibility, and close communal relationships (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018). One of the strongest manifestations of this can be seen in the Tiv of central Nigeria, where the tradition of conducting public ceremonies of forgiveness and reconciliation involves making offenders confess their wrongdoings publicly, thereby making it possible to not only rehabilitate them but also reintegrate them into their communities (Egbefo, 2016).

The applicability of the approaches is further evident when considered in the context of the realities of Rivers State in the Niger Delta. This part of the world, despite its huge oil deposits and other natural resources, has been politically marginalized, economically unequal, and subjected to extreme environmental degradation for decades. These circumstances have led to repeated conflicts and long-term distrust between local communities and government agencies and multinational oil companies (Habiba, 2018; Okolo, Akpokighe & Igbokwe, 2014; Umezurike, 2016). It is against this background that the dependence on cultural traditions and communal figures of authority has, in many instances, been the most feasible way of alleviating friction and ensuring precarious peace. Therefore, the Niger Delta situation is not only one that can support anthropological peace-building strategies, but one that requires them.

In Rivers State in particular, these traditions have assumed very organized forms. The cultural approaches in this regard recognize the power of community leaders, chiefs, and elders who are tasked with resolving conflicts in a manner that is seen as just and unbiased (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). The process of conflict resolution usually goes through truth-telling forums, open ceremonies of forgiveness, and the intentional construction of consensus (Umezurike, 2016). Within the Ogoni and Ijaw communities, as an example, elders hold formalized meetings of truth-telling in which the grievances are aired, and reparations are decided upon by consensus. These practices provide more than just settling a conflict in the short term; they strengthen social unity and mutual responsibility, thus establishing a more solid basis for sustainable peace.

These methods are most effective when it comes to conflict over land ownership, cultural identity, and intercommunal tensions, which formal legal systems often fail to resolve (Egbefo, 2016). One such example is the age-grade system, which is a generational institution whereby members of the community within the same age group perform civic responsibilities such as settling disputes before they degenerate into violence (Ibaba, Ukaga & Ukiwo, 2012). This system prevents crises since it manages tensions at their initial stages, and it also enhances intergenerational solidarity. By so doing, it addresses not only the short-term conflict but also the underlying causes of conflict, which include social exclusion, marginalization, and loss of trust in the state institutions (Omeje, 2004).

There is great potential in incorporating these local solutions into official peace-building programs. This kind of integration would fill the gap between community practices and state systems, increase the legitimacy of peace processes, and make solutions consistent with the experiences of the people. Practically, it turns peacebuilding into a bottom-up imposition into a collaborative process that is based on cultural heritage and institutional backing. Respecting the indigenous practices, state actors, NGOs, and international partners can enhance local ownership of peacebuilding, enhance the durability of agreements, and promote cooperation instead of resistance.

Here, the current research is concerned with three important cultural strategies in Rivers State, which are the age-grade system, community dialogue forums, and reconciliation ceremonies. The research aims to assess the effectiveness of these practices in promoting reconciliation and sustainable peace through a thorough examination of their nature. Moreover, it examines how these culturally based approaches can supplement state-based efforts to provide a more comprehensive, contextually specific model of conflict resolution in Nigeria's historically turbulent environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Amongst the Niger Delta states, Rivers State is known as a hotbed of long-term insecurity despite the oil and gas resources bestowed on it, which is a paradox of resource wealth and structural deprivation and environmental degradation (Ikelegbe, 2010). What was supposed to bring mutual prosperity has led to dispossession, marginalization, and ecological destruction through extractive activities that have displaced communities, sterilized farmlands, and polluted rivers, destroying livelihoods and increasing precarity (Ikelegbe, 2005; Habiba, 2018). Despite the significant fiscal revenues that oil has generated for the Nigerian state, the benefits have not been translated into the development of host communities in Rivers State, which has led to deep-seated resentment towards the government and multinational oil companies and the perpetuation of cycles of protest, violent confrontation, and coercive crackdowns (Ikelegbe, 2005; Habiba, 2018).

These tensions have not been addressed by traditional responses. Official political and legal responses are still too centralized, technocratic, and not deeply rooted in the cultural and historical backgrounds that determine community grievances and social mobilization in the Delta (Bamidele & Erameh, 2023). The resort to militarized security operations, court decisions, and executive fiats has brought at best temporary relief and replicated the same processes of exclusion and mistrust that drive local opposition (Ibaba, 2011). To many inhabitants, these measures seem externally imposed and insensitive to lived experience, further reinforcing the idea of the state as an occupying force instead of a credible, fair mediator able to preside over justice and reconciliation (Osaghae, 2015). The fact that conflict persists and even intensifies after each round of state action highlights a fundamental design issue: tools that place emphasis on control and compliance over legitimacy and inclusion are ill-equipped to achieve lasting peace (Ibaba, 2011; Osaghae, 2015; Bamidele & Erameh, 2023).

This recurring stalemate points to the necessity of peace-building strategies that are rooted in local cultural systems, values, and social relationships. An alternative route is an anthropological approach, which focuses on indigenous knowledge, community involvement, and the moral authority of the respected institutions, aligning the process and remedy with the community notions of justice and social repair (Davies & Leonard, 2025). Age-grade associations, elder-mediated mediation, and reconciliation meetings are traditional mechanisms that have been used in Rivers State to order social life and mediate conflicts, restoring dignity and rebuilding trust when formal channels have failed (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Such practices are culturally legitimate since they are part of communal life, and they appeal to common understandings of wrongdoing, accountability, and restoration. However, even though they are salient and have a track record, they are under-recognized and underutilized within official peace-building architectures, and a reservoir of social capital remains unexploited (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

The issue of poor interface between state-led systems of peace-building and local systems of peacemaking in Rivers State is thus the main issue. This institutional disjuncture undermines the efficacy of interventions by marginalizing culturally legitimate authorities and processes and thus limits local ownership and undermines sustainability prospects. It also restricts the ability of peace initiatives to respond to layered grievances, material, symbolic, and procedural, in modalities that communities view as fair and meaningful. It is important to develop an integrated model that brings together the participatory, restorative power of anthropological tools with the resources, protections, and scalability of formal systems to move Rivers State beyond episodic conflict management to sustainable peace. This kind of model would increase trust, legitimacy, and a peace process that communities can own.

An examination of the available literature shows that there are significant gaps that guide the current study. First, numerous studies are recording the cycles of violence, environmental

degradation, failure of militarized or centralized approaches in the Niger Delta (Ibaba, 2011; Osaghae, 2015; Bamidele and Eramah, 2023), but there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of specific indigenous institutions, like age-grade institutions, elderly mediation, and reconciliation rituals, when applied in systematic soil or compound with the state processes in different forms of conflicts and community situations. On the same note, issues relating to the comparative analysis of legitimacy, compliance, and the long-term recurrence rates of purely formal interventions versus the hybrid community-based models are not present in Rivers State. It is still not clear which sets of actors, procedures, and incentives are most efficient for creating sustainable settlements.

Extant literature also tends to assume that community is a unitary actor and does not pay enough attention to the intra-community processes of gender, age cohorts, and elite capture that influence inclusion in indigenous fora and the allocation of peace dividends, thus concealing the circumstances under which indigenous practices can perpetuate inequalities unless carefully conceived and overseen. Lastly, policy literature is biased towards programmatic description rather than outcome-based, mixed-method assessment, which constrains the evidence base of scaling hybrid architecture in Rivers State. To fill these gaps, the study will evaluate how effective an anthropological approach to conflict resolution is in Rivers State and outline design principles that can be used to integrate indigenous and formal mechanisms to enhance the quality and sustainability of peacebuilding in the state.

1.3. Research Question

This research was guided by the following specific questions:

1. How do traditional leadership and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to peace-building efforts in Nigeria, and how do they interact with formal state mechanisms?

2. How do cultural practices and social structures within Nigerian communities influence the outcomes of peace-building initiatives, and what lessons can be drawn for broader conflict resolution strategies?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The broad aim of this study is to identify extant local approaches to peacebuilding in Rivers State and determine their effectiveness in fostering reconciliation and sustainable peace. In this respect, the research proposal is aimed at:

1. Explaining how traditional leadership institutions and local conflict resolution models contribute to peace-building efforts in Rivers State and how they are interrelated with official state-based undertakings.
2. Investigate the forms that cultural practices and organizational social structures of local communities take in determining the results of peacebuilding efforts and find lessons that may apply in elaborating the general ways of resolving conflicts in Nigeria.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research is theoretically focal since it adds to the existing literature on anthropological perspectives on peacebuilding, especially in fragile, multi-ethnic states like Nigeria. The research will contribute to the scholarly discussions of hybrid types of peacebuilding by looking at how the indigenous processes, including youth involvement programs, traditional mediation, and reconciliation rituals, can be integrated into official, state-driven frameworks in a systematic way. It enhances academic knowledge on the concepts of cultural legitimacy, social capital, and participatory conflict resolution, and it gives evidence that hybrid methods can increase the legitimacy and sustainability of the peace processes. By so doing, the study not only fills an existing theory-practice gap in peacebuilding but also forms a conceptual framework within which subsequent academic research into culturally responsive and

integrated conflict resolution models can be carried out. This qualifies it to be a useful source of reference to students, researchers, and scholars of peacebuilding, anthropology, and African studies.

On this theoretical basis, the research also has great practical application to policymakers, peace practitioners, and community stakeholders involved in conflict resolution in Rivers State and the Niger Delta in general. Its recommendations convert locally based knowledge into practical advice, showing how the power and institutions of the Nigerian state can become active participants towards integrating the effective indigenous interventions into formal peace-building initiatives. Integration has provided a means of overcoming the trust deficit between the local populations and the state actors, one of the most intractable impediments to sustainable peace in the region. The research provides peace-building practitioners, such as NGOs, international organizations, and grassroots agencies, with a culturally sensitive, context-specific set of strategies that incorporate anthropological understanding with mainstream practice. The strategies can be used as practical tools in the development of interventions that are appealing to community realities, local values, and actual cooperation between formal and informal systems of mediation. By doing so, the study not only contributes to the scholarly debate but also provides the actors on the ground with the tools that are both contextually legitimate and operationally feasible.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This paper looks at the anthropological perspective of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Rivers State, Nigeria, with specific reference to how indigenous cultural practices, community-based mediation systems, and youth engagement programs can lead to lasting peace in conflict-affected societies. Rooting the analysis in cultural legitimacy and social embeddedness, the research examines the role of such locally based mechanisms as complements to formal, state-

led interventions, and in what circumstances they can contribute to trust, compliance, and sustainability of settlements in a historically unstable environment. In concept, it is a three-fold interconnected area of normative-cultural practices (e.g., reconciliation rites, truth-telling forums, elders' arbitration), institutional-social structures (e.g., age-grade associations, councils of chiefs, community assemblies), and participatory modalities (e.g., youth-oriented rehabilitation and engagement schemes), and these are all considered as overlapping layers of a hybrid peace-building structure.

Geographically, the study is confined to Rivers State in the Niger Delta, where resource extraction, environmental degradation, and political struggle have generated endemic insecurity and frequent communal violence, thus making it an important site to test hybrid models that integrate formal systems with local systems of authority. In temporal terms, the research will focus on the present policies and practices over the last ten years up to 2024 to reflect on current dynamics and place them in the context of the historical development of community-based and state-based conflict management in Rivers State, including prominent local experiences like the Ogbakiri case and community security arrangements interacting with the traditional institutions. In terms of methodology, the study would use a mixed qualitative-quantitative design that would draw on structured questionnaires, case studies of exemplary conflicts and solutions, and systematic examination of secondary sources relevant to the cultural and social context of the Niger Delta; this would permit triangulation among community perceptions, institutional practices, and documented outcomes, and would permit comparative evaluation of formal, traditional, and hybrid approaches to peace.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is arranged in five interconnected chapters, which are structured in a manner that each chapter is linked to the previous one to ensure coherence. This introductory chapter provides the background and contextual premises underlying the study. It introduces the

research problem, questions, objectives, and significance, thus establishing the context of the study. Chapter Two provides a critical literature review, which looks at the available literature in relation to the issue. It notes the extent and gaps of previous research, conceptual and empirical gaps, and locates the current research within existing academic discourses.

Chapter Three will describe the research methodology. It will discuss the research philosophy and design, the study population, and the sampling strategy that was used. It also explains the data collection instruments and techniques as well as the analytical methods used to explain the findings. The fourth chapter reports and interprets the data produced by these methodological processes and situates the results in the context of the study's aim and the literature reviewed.

The last chapter is a synthesis of the most important findings, and conclusions are drawn that answer the research questions and objectives. It also proposes policy and practice recommendations, determines the contributions that the study makes to knowledge, and indicates where future research on anthropological approaches to peacebuilding in similar settings, like Rivers State, should be done.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualizing the Anthropological Approach to Peacebuilding

Anthropological conceptualizations of peacebuilding are those which perceive peace as a culturally situated and processual achievement based on lived experience, social plasticity, and locally authoritative repertoires of conflict management (Fry, 2007; Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). Practices, moral accounts, and institutional constructions that societies accept as legitimate make peace and remake peace. This view combines a long-term criticism of war-normalizing discourses with an ethnographically infused explanation of how individuals create, experience, manage, and innovate conflict in their everyday life (Lederach, 1997; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). It also bears a pragmatic obligation to build systematic, responsible, and nonviolent procedures that could substitute self-help and vindictive thinking with reputable structures of conflict management (Fry, 2007).

An anthropological perspective starts with the refusal to accept the argument that war is biologically determined. Theories that discuss organized violence as a developmental epidemiology, especially the ones that focus on man the warrior, are critically evaluated by the evidence in comparison (Fry, 2007). The cross-cultural synthesis by Fry is very careful in making the differences between war and other types of violence, like homicide, revenge killing, and feud. This definition is important in that arguments of generality are typically ruined when categories are explicitly defined. By defining war as organized, intercommunity, comparatively impersonal lethal aggression against non-specified members of an outgroup, ethnographic evidence has established that some societies do not engage in war whatsoever (Fry, 2007). Peace is not, then, a sentimental exception; it is an object to be seen historically, a social accomplishment. There is great variation in human societies in terms of behavior and

institutionalism. When social circumstances are nurtured, human plasticity can cooperate, restrain, and reconcile itself (Fry, 2007).

This analytical observation is validated by the larger anthropological literature on conflict and law. The volume edited by Bohannan shows that in all societies, conflict is dealt with in varying forms of law, self-help, ritual, adjudication, and even war (Bohannan, 1967). The difference between applied rules and structured fighting depicts that violence is not the only or the necessary way to solve conflicts. Even stateless societies have structured alternatives in the form of courts, moots, ordeals, and negotiated settlements. These analogical examples illustrate the multifariousness of institutional responses to struggle and emphasize that organized violence arises in specific social and political structures and not in obligatory human nature.

Reyna and Downs build on this by placing war into wider arenas of violence which incorporate material circumstances, institutional practices, symbolic definitions, and histories (Reyna and Downs, 1994). Aggression is not a synonym for war. It is inscribed within political economies and is constructed by social hierarchies and reproduced in narratives and embodied practices. Their effort warns against naive explanations of violence in anarchic conditions and the forthcoming interaction between structural determinants and cultural exegesis. This is consistent with the demand of the anthropological peace-building that the problem of violence be perceived as socially constructed and historically located instead of biologically predetermined.

Based on these premises, anthropological peacebuilding does not focus on force-based paradigms of security but lays emphasis on the cultural and relational infrastructures on which violence becomes imaginable, possible, and recurrent (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). Violence is an act, but a significant performance enclosed within interpretative frames that rationalize harm. Schmidt and Schroder underline the dialectic between imaginaries and practice. Violence

is first imagined and told before action is taken. The belonging, threat, and legitimate retaliation are coded in narratives, performances, and inscriptions. Escalation is made to seem reasonable and needful by polarizing us and their grammar. Peacebuilding in this frame is hence both conceptual and institutional work. It involves breaking down symbolic architecture that normalizes enmity and reforming common memory based on reconciliation instead of revenge (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001).

This symbolic aspect cannot be separated from daily life. The contemporary anthropological practices would demand that peace be built based on legitimacy and culturally rooted responsibility as opposed to being built by technocratic engineering (Lederach, 1997). Ethnography is not just a method but is an epistemic commitment. It considers grassroots knowledge, ritual practice, narrative memory, and everyday interaction as the main sources of evidence in the way conflicts are generated and changed. Richmond and Mac Ginty also criticize the top-down liberal peacebuilding, which interprets the moral worlds and the daily power relations in the locality. Contracts are viable to the extent that they speak to local social orders (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015).

Such a view is like that of Margaret Mead, who has been a long-time advocate of intercultural understanding and intergenerational communication as cornerstones to peace (Beeman, 2011). Mead suggested that ignorance of the cultural difference and the inability to learn from each other are the reasons why violence between nations may happen. She took anthropological questioning further into modern Western society, such as the United States, and showed that peace necessitates reflexive inquiries into one's own cultural suppositions. Contact and communication with other cultures are used as elements of preventing international aggression. Her work highlights the idea that anthropological peacebuilding should be locally and globally through creating mutual understanding across boundaries (Beeman, 2011).

It is possible to conceptualize anthropological peacebuilding, therefore, in the interacting dimensions. It is epistemically biased towards community-generated knowledge and lived explanation in the definition of harm and repair (Lederach, 1997). Normatively, it comprehends peace to be a relationship and a continuing process, being a negotiated coexistence and not just a fighting absence (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). On an institutional level, it acknowledges plural and overlapping authorities, such as religious, kinship-based, and institutional ones, as contested and compliant spaces instead of separate worlds (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). Pragmatically, it regards peacemaking as a repertoire, which can comprise mediation, arbitration, adjudication, telling of the truth, reconciliation rituals, and reparative practices that work due to trust and being perceived as fair (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001; Bohannan, 1967).

The strategy is also upward scaling. According to Fry, holistic policies to deal with inequality and structural conditions that vitiate hostilities are necessary to achieve true security (Fry, 2007). Interdependence connects the security of a polity to other polities. The element of coercive unilateralism will backfire in the world of global interconnection. This observation is similar to the analogy between acephalous societies that are dependent on self-help and an international system that does not have supreme power. Incentives to force are high in both situations where adjudicative systems are weak. Anthropological peacebuilding thus helps in supporting layered institutions that favour mediation, arbitration, and legal settlement to break the escalation at an early stage and normalize nonviolent settlement (Fry, 2007). This transformation is given as a possibility that can be achieved in the past and not in a utopian way.

Meanwhile, anthropology cautions that the local should not be romanticized. It is possible to hide coercion, exclusion, and elite domination under tradition (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). Peace discourses can either suppress objections or coerce victims into premature reconciliation.

Conceptually mature anthropological approach is reflexive concerning power at the community, national, and global levels (Reyna & Downs, 1994; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). Hybridity becomes a natural state of social life and not a flaw in design. The results of peacebuilding are the result of the negotiation between unequal actors who have conflicting norms. The dilemma is to maintain rights and legitimacy as well as adjust to the plural system of authority.

2.2 Traditional Leadership and Indigenous Peace-building Mechanisms

The traditional leadership in Nigeria is a complex paradigm of the local governments and authority structures that have been developing throughout centuries to play a broad governance role, and conflict mediation and resolution continue to be the primary functions (Otite & Albert, 2001). Simply put, traditional leadership embodies systems of governance based on cultural legitimacy, ancestral power, and communal social assent. These systems are run by institutions, like councils of elders, age-grade associations, chiefs-in-council, and paramount rulers, and through the moral authority of these institutions, disputes are resolved, harmony restored, and social order reestablished (Abdulsalam et al., 2020). In addition to their symbolic role, traditional leaders are the guardians of indigenous knowledge systems, customary laws, and cultural practices, which provide a foundation of cohesion in the community. In this respect, they are critical in preventing, managing, and transforming conflicts in various ethnic environments that face Nigeria, thereby maintaining peace through culturally based mechanisms that are inter-generational in their presence (Nwankwo, 1992; Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

The traditional leadership approach to indigenous conflict resolution is complex in terms of its procedural systems and emphasizes restoration as opposed to retribution, reconciliation instead of punishment, and community healing as opposed to individual vindication (Albert, 2001).

These processes are normally multi-tiered, starting at the family level under the heads and eldest males of the household (Okpara), then moving on to hamlet councils (Ikwu-ezi), clan assemblies (Umu-nna), and finally to the tribunal in the villages or the courts of paramount rulers. All the different levels have different jurisdictional powers based on the severity and extent of the conflict (Ogbobe, 2022). These processes are naturally participatory, whereby the disputants are given a chance to air their grievances before community members who are the witnesses, moral guarantors, and enforcers of societal norms (Ogbobe, 2022). They focus on telling the truth, social recognition of the misdeed, negotiated restitution, and ritualized reconciliation practices, which constitute their substantive core. Such negotiations will usually end with ceremonial activities like the sharing of kola nuts, libations to ancestors, or shared feasting, which mark the restoration of social relations and the integration of feuders into the larger social structure (Kpae, 2018).

This restorative orientation can be related to the larger anthropological data that has shown that the indigenous systems of leadership throughout the world are conducive to peace because of their focus on social reconciliation and institutionalization of non-violent release points of conflict (Fry, 2007). An example is that the insistence on open discussion and participatory witnessing in Nigerian village meetings reflects the Semai Becharaa, in which the deliberations on a community-wide basis go on until there is nothing left to complain about, and no new emotional stresses can occur (Fry, 2007). On the same note, the admonitive and moralizing intonation that is commonly assumed by Nigerian elders when resolving disputes echoes the judicial sermons in the Lozi, where judgments are made in the form of moral teachings to enable people to coexist in the future and not to punish the evil of the past (Fry, 2007). In this respect, the moral authority of the true Nigerian traditional leaders is equivalent to that of the Tarahumara gobernador, whose reprimands to the community can be used as effective deterrents because of the social stigma surrounding social disapproval (Fry, 2007).

Different elements interacting to support the effectiveness of the Nigerian traditional mechanisms have led to a situation that makes them superior to the formal legal systems. The first is that they are entrenched in common cultural beliefs about justice, morality, and a sense of shared and collective responsibility, leading to a high level of community acceptance and voluntary adherence to the consequences (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Resolutions are therefore seen as acceptable manifestations of the group's values rather than foreign impositions. Second, the traditional leaders have an extensive understanding of local histories, kinship systems, and socio-cultural processes, and can therefore work to resolve the causes of conflict rather than merely pass judgment on legal claims. This contextual understanding is especially useful in land tenure cases, marriage, and ancient complaints, which are in many instances difficult to adjudicate by formal courts (Otite & Albert, 2001). Third, its focus on restoration and reintegration makes sure that disputants do not lose social status in the community and, as a result, are not alienated, bitter, and adversarial as in the case of formal litigation (Ogboke, 2022).

Another distinctive element is the usage of spiritual and symbolic levels, such as oath-taking in the presence of deities, reference to the power of ancestors, and ritual cleansing. These factors become effective enforcement tools that are not based on the concept of coercion but on the idea of moral obligation and the fear of supernatural penalties to establish self-regulating systems of compliance that are sustainable even after the conflict is resolved (Kpae, 2018). Similar processes can also be seen in other indigenous situations, like the makarata ritual duel of the Murngin or the song duel of the Netsilik Inuit, where violence is ritualized and restrained by socially approved patterns that keep it within a non-deadly context (Fry, 2007). Physical ordeals are uncommon in Nigeria, but the ritual-based reconciliation has an analogous role as the symbolic burden of physical suffering by converting aggression into regulated and socially significant manifestations, which support the release of emotions and reconciliation.

Despite these advantages, traditional leadership and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have serious challenges in modern Nigeria. Colonial and postcolonial legal systems had a systematic process of destabilizing traditional power through creating parallel and even competing jurisdictions, which led to forum shopping, conflicts in jurisdictions, and erosion of the binding capacity of customary law (Nwankwo, 1992). The growth of the statutory courts, formal policing, and codified legal systems has pushed the traditional mechanisms to the peripheral areas of small-scale civil litigation, and the formal justice system takes care of serious criminal cases. It is the division that has disintegrated the holistic approach that was previously inherent in indigenous governance systems (Abdulsalam et al., 2020). Also, modernization, urbanization, and cultural change processes have undermined the communal bases of traditional authority, especially among younger generations who are more inquisitive about the applicability of traditional practices and demand alternative dispute resolution systems that reflect modern lifestyles and values (Ogbobe, 2022).

The question of equity, inclusion, and accountability also makes the traditional systems more complicated. The gender-based exclusions are still in existence, in that women are often sidelined in the decisions and in adjudication processes, and thus they cannot champion their interests in matters concerning marriage, inheritance, and domestic affairs (Otite & Albert, 2001). Hierarchies based on age can also make younger members of the community not speak, whereas the seizure of the elite by rich or politically advantaged people jeopardizes the principles of egalitarianism in customary justice (Kpae, 2018). In addition, the high level of informality and verballity of proceedings poses an accountability problem, since it is challenging to challenge a decision, it can be difficult to ensure that there is consistency of the proceedings, and that standard protection is usually not in place.

However, studies indicate that conventional mechanisms are still robust and efficient in certain situations, especially where conflicting issues are entrenched in terms of identity, land, and historical animosities. The conclusion of the Aguleri-Umuleri crisis in Anambra State (a South Eastern state) by traditional oath-taking rituals of the state in Anambra, when the legal and military measures failed to work out, exemplifies the peculiar ability of indigenous solutions to solve the deep-seated communal conflicts by means of culturally appealing procedures (Ajayi and Buhari, 2014; Albert, 2001). Likewise, an example is the Ile-Ife-Modakeke peace process and the Cross River-Ebonyi boundary settlement, in which traditional leaders succeeded in providing a continued conversation, consensus, and long-range peace by focusing on repairing relationships rather than precedent (Gbenemene, 2018). These findings represent larger anthropological perspectives that the indigenous peacebuilding is a process that provides non-violent options at each stage of conflict escalation (Schmidt & Schroder, 2001).

The modern-day scholarship has been influenced to promote hybridization of traditional as well as formal processes instead of viewing the two as mutually exclusive (Otite & Albert, 2001). The aim of such hybridization is the attempt to integrate the cultural authenticity and community anchoring of indigenous orders with the safeguards of rights and the capacity of institutions of formal laws. The possible paths in practice are constitutional recognition of customary courts, capacity-building of traditional leaders, procedural reforms to strengthen gender inclusion and transparency, and rights of appeal without sacrificing cultural authenticity (Abdulsalam et al., 2020).

The question concerning the traditional leadership in contemporary Nigeria is therefore a tense and conflictual issue. Whereas it is claimed by some of the scholars that the traditional authority should be revived as a means of correcting the shortage of the formal justice system, others warn about the romanticization of institutions that can sustain inequality as well as fail to introduce progressive social change (Ogbobe, 2022). The moderate stance demands an

analytical and critical framework based on the analysis of the practical functioning of traditional institutions with a careful approach to the experience of the marginalized groups, the views of which do not always coincide with the narratives of a mainstream culture. Positively, the recent research shows that a significant number of traditional leaders themselves acknowledge the need to change and become more tolerant towards introducing modern methods of dispute resolution and using indigenous solutions (Abdulsalam et al., 2020). This points to the possibility of evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary change, where the old systems become adjusted to modern realities and still maintain their core values of cultural embeddedness, restorative justice, and community ownership of the conflict resolution mechanisms.

2.3 State-led Approaches to Peacebuilding in the Niger Delta

State-led peacebuilding is a holistic pattern of action created and executed by central government officials to deal with the causes of conflict, to re-establish social order, and to establish lasting peace by the strategic mobilization of state resources, institutions, and policy tools (Department for International Development., 2010). Based on the liberal peace literature, these strategies are basically anchored on the premise that effective states have the legitimacy and ability to change the dynamics of conflict through institutional reforms, development programming, and the institution of rule-of-law mechanisms that can be used to address grievances without necessarily destabilizing the political process (Paris, 2004; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). The major difference between state-led peace-building and other methods is that state-led peacebuilding focuses more on top-down governance, uniform procedures, and central decision-making processes that allow the rapid mobilization of resources and coordination of interventions in several areas at the same time (Newman et al., 2009). The theoretical premise is based on the Weberian ideas of state power coupled with liberal institutionalist ideas about the ability of formal systems of governance to change social

relations and create lasting peace by democratic procedures, market reforms, and bureaucratic efficiency (Paris, 2010).

In the wider context of state-based peacebuilding, scholars and practitioners differentiate kinetic and non-kinetic approaches, which are manifestations of various state power projection and intervention approaches. Kinetic strategies include aggressive, offensive actions to kill or capture network members and their supporters and are usually characterized by the use of military force, police action, and coercive law enforcement tools aimed at neutralizing imminent security threats and exerting state control over disputed areas (Roberts & Everton, 2011, p. 3). These strategies are distinguished by their focus on physical engagement, rapid deployment capacity, and the employment of what military strategists refer to as hard power tools- direct combat, targeted killings, mass arrests, and destruction of infrastructure to attain short-term tactical goals (Roberts & Everton, 2011). Kinetic approaches are based on the premise that sustainable peace involves the physical destruction of violent parties and the creation of a state monopoly of the means of violence in contentious areas.

On the contrary, non-kinetic methods utilize neither bombs nor bullets but rather utilize non-coercive methods to counter networks and undermine the will of a combatant to fight, and are based on psychological operations, institution-building, information campaigns, and rehabilitation programs that are intended to address underlying grievances and change the nature of conflict through persuasion as opposed to coercion (Roberts & Everton, 2011, p. 3). Non-kinetic approaches include development programming, facilitation of dialogue, building capacities of civil society, and the process of reconciliation, aiming to gain the "hearts and minds" and to tackle structural sources of conflict, including poverty, marginalization, and environmental degradation (Kwede & Danbala, 2024). Such approaches are theoretically informed by the concepts of soft power in that they focus on the capacity of the state to influence the preferences and behaviors of target audiences through attraction and co-option,

rather than coercion, and hence the provision of conditions that will induce voluntary compliance and sustainable behavior change (Kwede & Danbala, 2024, p. 226).

The development of state-based peacebuilding in the Niger Delta represents this non-kinetic-kinetic divide as it shows the intricate relationship between coercive and persuasive efforts to resolve protracted resource conflicts. Kinetic approaches in the form of heavy-handed military interventions meant to safeguard oil infrastructure and quash militant activities by applying overwhelming force were predominant during the immediate post-military period under President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) (Human Rights Watch, 2000). The Odi massacre in November 1999, whereby an entire Bayelsa community was destroyed and hundreds of civilians killed, was a classic example of the kinetic paradigm of focusing on deterrence by means of disproportionate state violence (Human Rights Watch, 2000). This trend was to be repeated in subsequent deployments of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) across the region as it sought to employ conventional military tactics to fight pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, and militant attacks on oil installations, such as aerial bombardments, amphibious assaults, and long-term occupation operations (Asuni, 2005).

Such militarized interventions represented a state security paradigm that privileged the security of economic resources and foreign investment above the good of the community and managed the symptoms of conflict as opposed to underlying structural grievances relating to environmental degradation, political marginalization, and inequities in resource distribution (Larry & Ogoni, 2024). The theoretical basis of the kinetic approach was deterrence theory and rational choice theory, which assumed that the sheer displays of state power would deter any further opposition and communicate to both the internal and external community the determination of the government (Human Rights Watch, 2000). Nevertheless, empirical evaluations repeatedly showed that strictly kinetic operations produced new cycles of violence

and mistrust between populations and government forces, which often led to a greater escalation of tensions than their mitigation (Asuni, 2005).

Appreciating the shortcomings of purely kinetic approaches, the Obasanjo government was also seeking non-kinetic measures to direct development funds to the Niger Delta via special institutional arrangements. The creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 was the most ambitious non-kinetic state intervention in the region since its creation and is charged with the responsibility of coordinating infrastructure development, environmental remediation, and human capacity building in the nine oil-producing states (NDDC, 2006). The Commission was given huge sums of money, including 15 percent of federal spending in oil-producing states and 3 percent of the operating budget of oil companies, theoretically billions of dollars, to transform the region by non-violent means (Larry & Ogoni, 2024). The Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan, introduced in 2006 by the NDDC, identified a coordinated non-kinetic approach to poverty, environmental degradation, and infrastructure deficit through a comprehensive 15-year framework of action in education, healthcare, transportation, and economic diversification (NDDC Master Plan, 2006).

Nonetheless, the introduction of non-kinetic development programming came with systematic issues that compromised its ability to build peace. Empirical evaluations recorded ongoing issues of corruption, political manipulation, and elite capture that siphoned resources out of the hands of intended beneficiaries and into new avenues of inter-community rivalry and conflict (Akinyoade, 2022). The project selection and implementation processes of the Commission were accused of being top-down, technocratic, and not responsive to the needs of the community, frequently leading to inappropriate or technically inadequate infrastructure (Akinyoade, 2022). Analysis of individual NDDC projects indicated the ways in which development projects could actually exacerbate local tensions through the establishment of

patron-client relations that weakened traditional power structures without alleviating underlying grievances concerning environmental justice and political representation.

The inability to curb militant activities despite the colossal spending on non-kinetic developmental projects resulted in a paradigm shift in state strategy under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua that culminated in the initiation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009. The amnesty program was a mixed strategy that integrated aspects of a kinetic and non-kinetic strategy, whereby militants were given unconditional amnesty when they surrendered their weapons within a given period and were given rehabilitation, skills training, and reintegration (Edo et al., 2024). The structure of the program was based on the international post-conflict experience of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) elements, including the use of coercive (the need to surrender weapons) and persuasive (monthly stipends, educational opportunities) tools to attract voluntary participation (Ikenga, 2022).

The early evaluation of the amnesty program indicated that it was a major success in curbing violence and oil production disruptions, as militant attacks dropped drastically and crude production was back to the pre-crisis levels by 2011 (Ikenga, 2022). The seemingly successful nature of the program in bringing forth immediate peace dividends created international awareness of the program as a paradigm in solving resource conflicts by way of negotiated solutions instead of military success. But longer-term assessments showed more complicated results that pointed to structural shortcomings in state-centered interventions, whether kinetic or non-kinetic in nature. The concentration of the program on co-opting militant commanders instead of addressing grievances in the community, the exclusion of women and marginalized groups in reconciliation processes, and the focus on individual change instead of structural change posed sustainability issues that were revealed when other militant groups re-emerged in 2016 and started attacks once again (Eze, 2021).

Modern state-based peacebuilding has tried to overcome these deficiencies by attempting to integrate all aspects of the process in a more comprehensive way, integrating kinetic and non-kinetic components and integrating conflict-sensitive approaches and participatory design. The Foundation of Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), formed through the assistance of Chevron Corporation, is an advanced form of a non-kinetic model that focuses on local ownership and civil society participation and systematic analysis of conflict in its program development and execution (PIND Foundation, 2024). The PIND model involves capacity building of traditional leaders, enhancing community-based mechanisms of resolving conflict, and multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms where government officials, oil companies, and community representatives meet to discuss particular grievances in a collaborative rather than dictated solution.

The Niger Delta Development Commission has also tried to learn lessons from past failures by integrating them into current programs, including capacity-building programs to help traditional rulers improve their conflict management skills and, at the same time, improve their legitimacy and effectiveness in hybrid governance (NDDC, 2024). These programs acknowledge the importance of the traditional authorities in conflict prevention and resolution and therefore offer training on contemporary methods of mediation without interfering with the customary practices and cultural norms. Nevertheless, these efforts are still small-scale and have a limited influence, serving as side projects, but not part of the whole peace-building policies.

Critical reviews of state-centered peacebuilding in the Niger Delta point to some structural issues that constrain the success of government interventions, irrespective of whether they are kinetic or non-kinetic in nature. The centralization of the Nigerian federalism system has the effect of placing the decision-making process in the hands of Abuja, which introduces the institutional distance between policymaking and the context of policy implementation that

hinders responsiveness to local conditions and preferences (Akinyoade, 2022). Federal agencies that work in the Niger Delta do not always have intimate knowledge of community dynamics, cultural practices, and historical grievances, and thus their interventions might be technically sound but socially inappropriate or politically counterproductive. The political economy of oil extraction has established perverse incentives for both state and corporate actors to focus on short-term stability instead of long-term change, and instead of solving conflicts, they manage them (Eze, 2021).

The lack of affected communities' meaningful engagement in program design and implementation continues to enhance the same marginalization that creates the conflict situation in the first place, and thus interventions are viewed as external impositions instead of collaborative solutions (Akinyoade, 2022). Without effective accountability mechanisms, corruption, elite capture, and poor performance will continue to go uncorrected, destroying the effectiveness of the programs and the trust that the community has in state institutions. Peace-building functions are compartmentalized in many agencies, and this leads to coordination problems and opportunities to engage in synergistic interventions that might address several aspects of conflict at once are lost.

Overall, recent academic evaluations indicate that the most encouraging trends in state-led peace-building have been in the contexts in which government agencies have proactively engaged with traditional authorities, civil society organizations, and international players to establish hybrid forms of governance that integrate formal institutional capacity with local legitimacy and cultural relevance (PIND Foundation, 2024). These are collaborative conflict early warning systems that incorporate both traditional and modern monitoring systems, joint implementation committees that incorporate government officials and community representatives, and dispute resolution processes that incorporate formal arbitration and customary practices of reconciliation. These hybrid solutions acknowledge that sustainable

peace is not only the lack of violence but also the existence of legitimate forms of governance that can respond to grievances, regulate competition, and adjust to new conditions.

2.4 The Connection between Anthropological Approaches and Formal State Mechanisms for Peacebuilding

The nexus between anthropological and formal state-based peace-building methods is one of the most complicated and controversial realms in the current conflict resolution literature, reflecting tensions amongst cultural authenticity and institutional capacity, local legitimacy and legal consistency, and participatory processes and bureaucratic efficiency (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017). In essence, this relationship is what researchers have described as hybrid political orders in which customary systems of governance, traditional authorities, and customary conflict management systems coexist with, or exist within, or in conflict with statutory legal systems, state institutions, and formal administrative systems (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). These hybrid arrangements do not arise as a conscious design but as a practical adaptation to the inadequacy of purely formal or purely traditional solutions, and they open spaces in which various normative orders, institutional logics, and authorities negotiate, compete, and possibly complement one another in the achievement of sustainable peace (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017) (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017).

The theoretical underpinnings of the knowledge of this relationship are based on the criticisms of the liberal peace orthodoxy that has long favored state-centric, institutionalist approaches to peacebuilding at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems and customary governance structures (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). Critics have claimed that formal state mechanisms, though providing standardization, protection of rights, and bureaucratic potential, frequently fail to have cultural appeal, social embeddedness, and context sensitivity that are required to resolve long-standing conflicts in diverse societies (Mac Ginty, 2011). On the other hand, anthropological approaches are legitimate, culturally relevant, and community-owned but can

have problems with scale, consistency, and compatibility with contemporary legal systems and human rights norms (Chandler, 2010). This has created a research interest in the study of hybrid models that attempt to bring together the benefits of both methods and reduce the drawbacks of each (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015).

Practically, the interrelation between anthropological and formal approaches is realized in different institutional structures and interfaces of procedures. The formal acknowledgment of customary law in the Constitution alongside statutory law opens avenues where the traditional authorities can carry out judicial roles within state-approved systems, as seen in the hybrid legal system in Nigeria, where English common law, Islamic Sharia, and customary law coexist under constitutional guidelines (Oba, 2014). Another interface is using alternative dispute resolution mechanisms within formal court systems, whereby the traditional mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation processes can be implemented as accepted alternatives or supplements to litigation (Jackson, 2011). Formal incorporation of traditional authorities into local government systems can also be in the form of advisors, mediators, or cultural consultants within statutory administrative systems, but this is frequently subject to criticism of co-optation, accountability, and the maintenance of traditional legitimacy (Jackson, 2011).

The success of such links is highly contingent upon design characteristics that either support or inhibit effective cross-institutional working relationships. Procedural interoperability, which enables evidence, decisions, and sanctions to be accepted and applied in both traditional and formal systems, may be necessary to have successful integration and enable disputes to be shifted between forums depending on appropriateness, preference, or necessity (Oba, 2014). Pluralist legal frameworks, which recognize the existence of different sources of law and authority and set clear hierarchies and dispute resolution systems, assist in the management of conflict between competing normative orders (Jackson, 2011). Communication and cooperation across institutional boundaries can be enhanced by capacity-building programs

that increase the knowledge of the traditional leaders on formal legal procedures and formal justice actors on cultural sensitivity and customary law (Okoli et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the relationship between anthropological methods and the official state apparatus also produces a lot of difficulties and criticisms. The asymmetries of power tend to prevail in favor of formal institutions, which have more resources, legal support, and the international community, and this may result in the instrumentalization of the traditional instruments as legitimacy-enhancing extensions as opposed to real partners in governance (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015). The integrity of both systems can be compromised, and inconsistent outcomes can be produced when parties strategically select between traditional and formal venues based on expected outcomes rather than suitability (Forum shopping) (Oba, 2014). Jurisdictional tussles over issues that are within the competence of both systems may create confusion, time wastage, and institutional rivalry, which is neither efficient nor legitimate (Jackson, 2011).

Another issue that is a challenge to hybrid arrangements is the compatibility of traditional practices with the current human rights standards. Although traditional systems may be focused on restoring, reconciliation, and community harmony, they can also replicate and reflect past inequalities, especially those that are based on gender, age, and social status, which are inconsistent with the principles of equal treatment and individual rights (Chandler, 2010). On the other hand, formal legal systems, as they provide rights protection and procedural fairness, can introduce alien notions of justice that do not respond to community needs in terms of spiritual healing, relationship restoration, and social reintegration (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). The negotiation of such tensions must be sensitive to context, involve wide consultation with impacted communities, and involve a reiterative design practice that can respond to new challenges and opportunities.

Political will, allocation of resources, and institutional backing by both the state and traditional authorities are critical to the sustainability of the linkages between anthropological and formal approaches. Unless government actors are sincere in decentralizing power and resources to traditional institutions, hybrid arrangements can be superficial, or ceremonial as opposed to functional (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017). In the same way, the traditional leaders must be ready to change their ways, be subject to governance, and be ready to work alongside formal institutions without losing their cultural identity and the legitimacy of their community (Jackson, 2011). Such a two-fold commitment necessitates constant negotiation, building trust, and institutional learning, which is likely to be interrupted by political shifts, resourcefulness, or competing interests among stakeholders.

Modern research has found several issues that tend to promote or hinder fruitful interactions between anthropological and formal approaches. Sensitivity to the context, such as knowledge of local histories, power relations, and cultural dynamics, is crucial in coming up with the right interfaces that would not violate either the traditional or the new logic of governance (Mac Ginty, 2011). The inclusion of all interested parties in the design of hybrid arrangements through participatory design processes is likely to contribute to solutions that capture a wide range of perspectives and interests and develop a sense of ownership and commitment among key actors (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). Institutional flexibility and adaptability enable hybrid systems to develop in the face of changing circumstances, emerging challenges, and lessons learned during implementation (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017).

The relationship also needs to take into consideration the scalar considerations, whereby those traditional systems that are effective at the community level might be ineffective when it comes to solving regional or national conflicts, whereas formal mechanisms that are meant to operate at a broader level might fail when applied to highly localized conflicts (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015). The sequential strategies that enable various mechanisms to be applied at various phases

of conflict cycles (traditional strategies to prevent and intervene in conflicts at an early stage, formal mechanisms to address serious violations that demand sanctions, and hybrid processes to deal with post-conflict reconciliation) can be more subtle than attempts to develop a single system (Jackson, 2011).

Empirical evidence indicates that the most effective integration of anthropological and formal approaches is where there is a distinct role differentiation and not integration, where each system can act in its strength and yet remain coordinated and mutually aware (Okoli et al., 2023). Conventional systems can be centered on repairing relationships, healing communities, and prevention, whereas formal systems deal with severe crimes, rights abuse, and issues that need a precedent in the court, and hybrid processes deal with cases that belong to both worlds or need a combination of interventions (Oba, 2014). This division of labor strategy acknowledges that various kinds of conflicts can be better served by various institutional arrangements, but also that no conflicts will be left to fall into the cracks of systems.

Digitization and modernization of traditional processes can be used to enhance links with formal mechanisms as well as pose some challenges. Technology has the potential to augment record-keeping, enhance transparency, and communication between traditional and formal institutions, but also has the potential to erode the oral, ceremonial, and relational dimensions that make traditional processes so culturally powerful and legitimate (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015). It is important to negotiate with traditional authorities and the communities that are impacted by the changes so that technological adjustments can be made to increase rather than decrease the effectiveness of the traditional systems.

2.5 Overview of Conflict in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria, which has an abundance of natural resources and oil, has experienced decades of political, social, and environmental unrest. The region is largely

populated by ethnic groups like the Ijaw, Ogoni, and Itsekiri. The Niger Delta contributes significantly to the Nigerian economy, from the production of over 90% of Nigeria's foreign revenue from crude oil (Ikelegbe, 2011; Taft & Haken, 2015). Despite this economic benefit, Niger Delta communities are plunged into squalid poverty, environmental degradation, and political exclusion, which increases grievance and chronic conflict with the Nigerian state and foreign oil multinationals who conduct operations on its territory. Uncontrolled environmental degradation through operations of crude oil production, such as gas flaring, crude oil spilling, and felling of trees, is one of the principal issues confronting the Niger Delta (Habiba, 2018).

The village of Ogoni land in Rivers State has experienced a negative impact on drinking and fishery water sources, soil, and biodiversity by the oil spill, as reported by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), thus posing risks to people whose livelihoods involve fishing and farming (UNEP, 2011). With rampant unemployment among the people and no clean water and food, the combined effect of these environmental conditions has led to the displacement of thousands of citizens and additional economic suffering (Nwosu, 2016). The inability of the government to crack down on environmental law or to prosecute multinationals has allowed such problems and forged an impression of collusion on the part of the government with firms in robbing the country. The natives, perceiving that their resources accrue into the pockets of remote elites instead of themselves in terms of money and environment, have cultivated cumulative resentment among themselves (Okaba & Nte, 2008; Ibaba, 2011).

While the activities were typically greeted with violence and repression by state security forces, environmentalists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) organized communities, and this resulted in protests and campaigns for environmental justice (Habiba, 2018). The economic disparity between Niger Delta poverty and the wealth generated from oil is another top causal factor of conflict among Niger Delta communities. Niger Delta states like Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta are the poorest and most

unemployed in Nigeria, despite their contribution to the national economy (Amnesty International, 2009). The indigenous persons claim that since they get only a percentage of the revenue gained from their resources, the revenue-sharing policies of the federal government are unfair.

Rising militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) have resulted from this economic marginalization (Habiba, 2018). These organizations have assaulted oil installations to urge the government for a larger share of oil income and better economic possibilities for their areas through acts of sabotage, including pipeline destruction and oil theft (Tantua, Kamruzzaman, 2016). Although certain militant groups have advocated social justice and equitable distribution of resources, their actions have, at times, culminated in kidnapping, ransom, and violence, thus destabilizing the area (Idemudia, 2017). Political marginalization and the absence of representation of the local population in decision-making regarding the governance of resources have heightened tensions in the Niger Delta (Ajala, 2015).

The local communities have been silenced or benefited from decisions on oil production through the centralization of the control of oil revenues to the Nigerian federal government. Centralization of such nature has been a contributing factor to the establishment of distrust between the state governments, the federal government, and the local communities (Watts, 2004; Habiba, 2018). Political tensions have also been created by the use of force by the federal government to suppress opposition because security forces have been implicated in human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings, and destruction of property (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The way funds for the Niger Delta development are managed contributes further to political tensions. Initiated earlier to support infrastructure and social amenities in the area, policies by the government, such as the Niger Delta Development

Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, have been rendered ineffective due to corruption and inefficiency (Aniche, 2019).

Research shows that political elites will divert funds that are supposed to be used for development, thus denying the locals many benefits (Ibaba, 2011). This has further deepened the perception of government insensitivity and facilitated militant activities. The intricate interactions of political marginalization, economic marginalization, and environmental destruction have spawned a culture of violence and distrust that cannot be overcome by peacebuilding in the Niger Delta. Although the 2009 Amnesty Program helped to prevent violence by offering economic incentives and vocational training to former militants in the short run, it failed to address structural conflict-causal factors that included environmental justice, equitable resource allocation, and political rights (Osaghae, 2015). In the Niger Delta, a more sustainable approach to achieving peace is the one that incorporates the environmental rehabilitation of the area, socioeconomic development, and peace-building processes into a culture-sensitive approach, which involves the locals in the process of making decisions.

2.6. Theoretical Framework: Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human societies, but how the communities address conflict defines whether it is disastrous or productive. In the current research, the theoretical framework will be the Conflict Transformation Theory, which is a culturally based approach that was invented by John Paul Lederach (1995, 1997) as the theoretical framework in the investigation of the anthropological modalities of peacebuilding in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conflict Transformation Theory transcends the conventional approaches to conflict resolution and conflict management paradigms by highlighting the profound relational, cultural, and structural aspects of the conflict and the potential that it offers for societal transformation. This renders it especially appropriate to the focus of the study on the traditional leadership, native

mechanisms, and cultural practices, which are both relational and inherently embedded in the life of a community.

Conflict Transformation Theory was developed as opposed to traditional methods of conflict, specifically those of the Western legalistic and state-based approaches. The traditional conflict resolution will seek to solve conflicts by coming to an agreement between the conflicting parties, whereas conflict management will seek to contain the violence as opposed to addressing its causes. By contrast, conflict transformation views conflict not merely as a problem to be solved but as a dynamic process that can catalyze growth, understanding, and systemic change (Lederach, 1997).

According to Lederach, conflict is embedded in relationships, histories, structures, and cultures, and thus any lasting peace effort must transform these underlying systems rather than merely stop surface-level disputes. Conflict transformation is therefore both relational and structural: it seeks to repair broken relationships at the interpersonal and communal levels while simultaneously addressing structural inequalities, historical grievances, and institutional dysfunctions (Lederach, 2003). This perspective resonates strongly with anthropological understandings of society, which emphasize the interconnectedness of cultural practices, symbols, and social systems in shaping human behavior. For Lederach (1997), transformation involves four key dimensions:

- i. Personal Transformation – changing attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of individuals involved in the conflict.
- ii. Relational Transformation – rebuilding trust, forgiveness, and interdependence among conflicting groups.
- iii. Structural Transformation – addressing systemic injustices, resource inequalities, and institutional weaknesses that sustain conflict.

- iv. Cultural Transformation – reimagining shared narratives, meanings, and cultural symbols that frame people’s understanding of conflict and peace.

These dimensions will be consistent with the realities of peacebuilding in Rivers State, where the conflicts are usually based on the fight over the resources (particularly over oil), ancient disputes between ethnic communities, and failures in traditional authority and governance. Rituals, shared meals, and cleansing ceremonies are not only symbolic but are also very cultural processes, in which the relationships, identities, and harmony in the community are restored.

Anthropology is abundant in the information concerning the practice of peacebuilding in communities, such as rituals, symbols, kinship systems, and local institutions. The Conflict Transformation Theory is a theory that will build on these anthropological approaches because it brings a conceptual framework to how cultural practices and local knowledge systems actively reshape conflict. It is especially true of the African societies, as the peace-building process is quite frequently comprehensive and spiritual in nature, based on the principles of kinship, spirituality, and community (Bandeira & Ferraro, 2017).

The traditional leaders in Rivers State, which include chiefs, elders, and lineage councils, are the key figures in dispute mediation. These leaders do not merely resolve conflicts; they are involved in procedures that aim at restoring harmony in communities, mending relationships, and reinstating cultural expectations. As an illustration, the reconciliation rituals and post-war feasts are transformative rituals that restore trust and instill the experience of peace in the memory of the community. They are practices that are indicative of what Lederach (1995) refers to as peacebuilding within, the importance of cultural legitimacy, and local ownership of solutions as opposed to solutions that are imposed externally.

Besides, Conflict Transformation Theory emphasizes the multi-level nature of peacebuilding, which is crucial in the Rivers State context. Community-based institutions are at the local level,

where interpersonal and intra-communal conflicts that include land disputes, chieftaincy, and marriage disputes are solved. On a regional and national basis, the institutions of the law and their state respond to some wider structural problems, such as oil-related destruction of the environment and political tension between ethnic groups. Conflict Transformation Theory promotes communication and cooperation among these layers, establishing hybrid peace-building institutions that integrate the capabilities of indigenous and formal establishments.

Relevance of the Theory

The first objective of this study seeks to explain how traditional leadership institutions and local conflict resolution models contribute to peace-building efforts in Rivers State and how they interact with state-based systems. Conflict Transformation Theory provides a powerful lens for analyzing these dynamics.

Traditional leaders embody what Lederach (1997) refers to as relational actors who possess deep cultural legitimacy and the ability to convene diverse stakeholders. Unlike court systems, which often emphasize punishment and legal precedent, traditional mediation focuses on restoring relationships through dialogue, negotiation, and symbolic acts of reconciliation. For instance, chiefs and elders in Rivers communities often begin dispute resolution sessions with rituals that invoke ancestral authority, thereby situating the process within a shared moral and spiritual framework. These practices transform not only the immediate conflict but also the broader social relationships that sustain community cohesion.

The theory also helps explain the interface between indigenous and state systems. While traditional leaders address the relational and cultural dimensions of conflict, state institutions provide structural support through legal enforcement and resource allocation. However, tensions can arise when these systems are misaligned, for example, when government-appointed chiefs lack local legitimacy or when court rulings contradict traditional settlements.

Conflict Transformation Theory encourages integrative approaches, where both systems work collaboratively to achieve sustainable peace. This reflects the “hybrid peacebuilding” model advocated by Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013), which emphasizes blending local and formal mechanisms.

The second objective focuses on the role of cultural practices and social structures in shaping peace-building outcomes and drawing lessons for wider conflict resolution in Nigeria. Conflict Transformation Theory explicitly recognizes the cultural dimension of peace, making it ideally suited for this analysis.

Cultural practices such as cleansing rituals, joint festivals, and public reconciliation ceremonies are not merely symbolic; they are transformative performances that change how communities experience and remember conflict. Drawing on Victor Turner’s (1969) anthropological insights into rituals and social dramas, these practices can be seen as stages of separation, liminality, and reintegration. For instance, when warring groups publicly share a meal or exchange gifts, they symbolically enact a new relationship, signaling to the entire community that harmony has been restored. Conflict Transformation Theory provides conceptual tools to analyze these rituals as vehicles of cultural healing.

Similarly, social structures such as age-grade associations, youth groups, and women’s collectives function as mediators and early warning systems within communities. These groups represent what Lederach calls the middle-level leadership, bridging grassroots actors and formal authorities. They play critical roles in mobilizing collective action, enforcing community norms, and preventing small disputes from escalating into violence. Conflict Transformation Theory emphasizes building networks of relationships across these social structures, creating resilient communities capable of addressing conflicts proactively.

2.7. The Literature Gap

Although conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta have received a lot of scholarly attention, there remain a lot of empirical and theoretical gaps that restrict the comprehension of how indigenous practices, traditional leadership, and cultural mechanisms can help in achieving sustainable peace results. The most significant gap relates to the systematic incorporation of traditional and formal peace-building methods, where the available research on the topic consists of extensive descriptive accounts of local institutions of age-grade associations, councils of elders, and reconciliation ceremonies without a proper evaluation of their comparative performance or working dynamics when integrated with state-led interventions (Osaghae, 2015; Habiba, 2018; Akinyoade, 2022).

In addition to the above, the theoretical significance of cultural legitimacy in peace-building processes is recognized in the literature but there is a lack of empirical analysis of the impact of cultural practices and social structures on the measurable outcome of peace-building, especially the identification of which cultural aspects contribute to the community acceptance, under which circumstances the cultural resonance can be converted into the behavioral change, and how the cultural factors interrelate with the economic, political, and environmental factors to create sustainable settlements (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014; PIND Foundation, 2018). This analytical lack has the potential to restrict the ability to devise truly culturally informed interventions that can tap into indigenous knowledge systems beyond symbolic acknowledgment, as well as constrain theoretical development on the connection between anthropological practices and formal state structures in complex governance settings such as Rivers State.

The methodological terrain also suggests that there are equally gaping holes in the comparative analysis and long-term impact assessment that erode evidence-based policy formulation in Niger Delta peacebuilding. Most of the existing studies look at individual traditional

mechanisms or formal interventions instead of systematically comparing legitimacy, compliance, and recurrence rates of different mechanisms in similar conflict situations. It is hard to gauge relative effectiveness or determine complementarities to use in a hybrid arrangement (PIND Foundation, 2018; Umoh et al., 2024). An assessment of major state-led interventions such as the Presidential Amnesty Programme and Niger Delta Development Commission interventions shows specific gaps in the evaluation of long-term sustainability and community ownership, where quantitative measures of success, such as violence reduction and infrastructure delivery are prioritised over qualitative measures, such as social cohesion, intergenerational reconciliation, and restoration of trust between communities and the state institutions (Edo et al., 2024; Ikenga, 2022). This gap in evaluation blurs the picture of which elements of intervention are associated with the real transformation of conflict as opposed to short-term management of stability, and comparative designs that are mixed-methods do not allow systematic analysis of the institutional arrangements, procedural interfaces, and power-sharing arrangements that can facilitate productive interaction between the indigenous and formal systems.

Moreover, there exist critical gaps in scalar dynamics, inclusivity considerations, and power relations in the traditional peace-building systems that restrain both theoretical knowledge and practice of the anthropological approaches. Studies also do not provide sufficient answers to the question of how the traditional practices at the community level can be modified, networked, or institutionalized to address conflicts that exist across communities or ethnic groups or administrative jurisdictions, which is a critical gap since oil-related conflicts in Rivers State are usually between local communities, multinational corporations, and federal agencies operating at various geographical and institutional levels (Onuoha, 2023). At the same time, the literature shows that there is a lack of focus on the patterns of participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in the indigenous conflict resolution processes, and the

questions left unanswered are how the exclusions impact the legitimacy and effectiveness of the traditional mechanisms, whether the indigenous systems can be reformed to increase inclusivity without losing the cultural authenticity, and how the power dynamics within the traditional systems affect the outcomes of peace-building (PIND Foundation, 2018). The paper fills these overlapping gaps by offering an in-depth empirical study of the contributions of traditional leadership to peace-building in Rivers State, quantifying the impact of cultural practices on the success of peace-building, and studying the institutional interfaces where anthropological and formal approaches intersect to achieve different levels of success in different settings and configurations of stakeholders.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The study is located within the anthropological paradigms that aim at the study of human interactions, societies, and cultures through participant-oriented approaches. Anthropology provides an integrated approach through which traditional systems and formal institutions can be studied in relation to each other. Qualitative analysis identifies the symbolic meaning, rituals, and practices that lie at the center of mechanisms for conflict resolution in Rivers State. This is an approach that is in sync with the study's vision of valuing peacebuilding as a culturally and relationally situated process and not a repository of derivation techniques from the outside world.

3.1. Research Design

The research design is ethnographic and interpretive, with the belief that peacebuilding and conflict are relational and culture-bound phenomena. By using a qualitative methodology, the study seeks to uncover the nuanced power dynamics, identity, and meaning that shape how communities construct conflict and pursue reconciliation. Ethnographic studies allow for a rich description of emic realities, illustrating how individuals and groups make sense of their worlds and how their meanings inform their behaviors (Markee, 2013; Lim, 2025).

Semi-structured interviews are employed as the primary means of data collection. These interviews are designed to collect narratives that answer questions of participants regarding the origins of conflict, the legitimacy of such resolution instruments, and activities of various actors towards building peace. Open-ended questions enable participants to express themselves in their own terms, allowing new themes and understandings to be developed that were not predetermined. This flexibility is important where formalized questionnaires would not be able to fully appreciate social relations and cultural practices.

3.2. Data Collection Method

Data collection is through semi-structured interviews, which provide a formal yet flexible mechanism for data collection. The interview itself is a mixture of having a set core of questions but also having freedom to go off in exploring themes in greater depth (Lim, 2025). This approach is suitable for the anthropological focus of research because it allows participants to express themselves in their own terms, as well as provide tales that reveal the cultural meaning of what they have lived.

The interview guide covers several core issues. Respondents are asked about their knowledge of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation by elderly persons, truth-telling ceremonies, and reconciliation rituals. They are invited to comment on the legitimacy and effectiveness of these mechanisms compared with state-initiated formal processes. Interviews also raise the issue of contact between community leaders, government authorities, and other outside actors such as NGOs and transnational corporations. Attention is given to issues of participation and inclusion, especially to women, youth, and marginalized groups. The participants are asked to submit case studies of past and present conflict and resolution, and to provide concrete examples of how conflicts are resolved in life. Finally, they are asked to provide recommendations on how hybrid peace-building models integrating traditional and formal types can be improved.

For guaranteeing cultural sensitivity and linguistic access, interview instruments are designed for applicability across ethnic groups. Translation support was provided as appropriate, and interviewers underwent training to be sensitive to local norms and communication styles. This cultural sensitivity to appropriateness enhances the quality of data and demonstrates respect for the participants.

3.3 Study Area

The study takes place in Rivers State, which is in southern Nigeria in the Niger Delta. Rivers State is strategically located since it possesses a blend of cultural diversity, economic relevance, and a conflict-prone environment. The area is characterized by a high density of ethnic groups, with their own politics, languages, and traditions. This diversity allows room for vibrant cultural exchange but also generates tensions and rivalries that can evolve into conflict. The study area map below



Source: Nwauzoma and Dappa (2013)

Figure 3.1: Map of Rivers State

Rivers State is also an oil-producing hub, which has caused wealth but also environmental degradation. Natural resource exploitation has underpinned conflicts over land, revenue

allocation, and political representation, accentuating cycles of violence and mistrust. Such conflicts are often exacerbated by historical grievances embedded in colonial and postcolonial state structures that marginalized local communities.

By focusing on Rivers State, the study situates its analysis in a context where traditional and contemporary institutions are present and sometimes in conflict. The geographical scope covers rural and urban locations, reflecting the variety of settings in which conflict resolution is practiced. The period covers the last decade, allowing for an examination of current developments while situating them within broader historical processes. This dual focus on both contemporary practices and historical trajectories provides a comprehensive picture of the forces at play.

3.4 Study Population

As discussed under section 3.3 above, the study setting for this research is Rivers State. The study population would thus be all adults' resident in the state. The exact figure for this is, according to 2022 estimates by the National Population Commission (2020), 7,476,805. From this population at large, the researcher worked with traditional leaders, intermediaries and custodians of cultural knowledge; elders, moral authorities and memories about the past; women leaders, offering gendered perspectives on conflict and peace-building; and youth leaders, a group that is often both implicated in violence and central to ending it.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study involved a sub-sample of 30 interviewees sampled from the population (above) to represent key stakeholder groups involved in peace-building processes. The stakeholders are sampled according to their direct involvement in or knowledge of conflict resolution mechanisms. They include farmers, traders, civil servants, traditional leaders, elders, women leaders, and youth leaders.

The inclusion of members from all these groups ensures the study gets a holistic perspective of the peace-building setting. Each group offers unique information about conflict causes, the effectiveness of various resolution mechanisms, and the challenges of combining traditional and formal systems. For instance, traditional leaders may emphasize ritual and customary law, while civil servants may highlight the state's legal and policy structures. Women leaders and youth leaders provide insights into inclusion and representation, demonstrating ways in which marginalized voices can be pulled into the peace-building process.

The study also reflects the ethnic diversity of Rivers State with the involvement of respondents from the Ijaw, Ikwerre, Ogoni, Eleme, Ogba, Ekpeye, Ibani, and Boma ethnic groups. This is significant in order to capture the dynamics of ethnic identity and conflict. Ethnic groups also have particular cultural practices and approaches to conflict resolution, and their relations can be a source of cooperation and tension. By engaging with this diversity, the research explores how interethnic relations shape the dynamics of peacebuilding and how cultural pluralism can be leveraged towards reconciliation.

A snowball sampling technique is employed to identify and recruit research participants. This is an appropriate technique for researching sensitive topics such as conflict and peacebuilding, where expertise on the topic is likely to be held by individuals who would otherwise be hard to access through conventional sampling approaches (Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Westland *et al.*, 2025). Snowball sampling begins with the identification of a small group of initial participants who are known to have experience or expertise in research. The participants are requested to refer others from within their networks, offering a chain-referral process that constructs the sample progressively.

The use of snowball sampling ensures that the participants are embedded within the institutions and social networks being studied. This enhances the validity and the richness of the data as

the respondents would have first-hand experience of the practices and processes under investigation. It also enables the inclusion of marginalized voices, for instance, young people and women, who may be excluded from formal lists of respondents or formal structures. By drawing on referrals from established and respected members of the community, the research gains rapport and trust that are necessary to garner candid and substantive feedback.

To secure diversity, the researcher actively seeks referrals across gender, age, and ethnic groups. This works to construct a balanced sample that reflects the heterogeneity of the population. The generated sample provides a rich diversity of perspectives, enabling the study to unravel both commonalities and differences in conflict resolution practice and understanding.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

The interview material for this study was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that uncovers and interprets meaning patterns across texts (Wolgemuth *et al.*, 2024). The analysis begins with the transcription of interviews, translating where necessary for precision. The transcripts are read in detail and coded to search for emerging concepts and themes. Initial coding covers descriptive categories, such as legitimacy, strategies for mediation, inclusion and exclusion, and reconciliation processes.

Following the development of initial codes, axial coding is used to explore the relationships among themes. This phase of analysis identifies the underlying structures and dynamics of the peace-building process, illustrating how different factors engage with one another to generate outcomes. For example, the analysis may identify how legitimacy for traditional leaders is related to authority, or how patterns of inclusion and exclusion shape peace sustainability.

The final stage of analysis is analytical synthesis, which integrates the empirical findings and the theoretical foundation of Conflict Transformation Theory. The synthesis provides a deeper

understanding of how peacebuilding is practiced, legitimized, and contested at the local level. It reveals how the traditional and formal systems overlap, complement, or contradict each other, and it provides insights into how these interactions can be managed to achieve sustainable peace.

Triangulation is employed to enhance the validity of the findings. Stakeholder reports are compared with secondary sources such as scholarly literature, public documents, and NGO reports. Cross-checking validates the authenticity of the information and identifies any discrepancies or gaps that have to be examined further. Triangulation also enables comparative analysis of different approaches to conflict resolution, providing a broader framework for result interpretation.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is a foremost concern during the research process. The study is designed to uphold the utmost levels of respect, transparency, and accountability in its interactions with participants. Informed consent is obtained from all the participants, to whom a clear explanation is provided regarding the aim of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Consent is obtained freely, and the participants are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Anonymity and confidentiality are strictly maintained. Personal details such as names and places are removed from reports and transcripts to guarantee the privacy of participants. Data is stored safely and accessed only by the research team. These measures are particularly required because of the sensitive nature of matters discussed and the risks to which those involved in conflict or peace-building activities could be subjected. The study has special concern for safeguarding vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and those involved in sensitive conflicts. Interview sites are carefully chosen to be safe and comfortable, and respondents are approached with respect and dignity. An effort is made to create an

environment where respondents feel at liberty to speak about their experiences without inhibition.

Participatory meaning is constructed into the research process via member-checking, in which participants can choose to read through transcripts and preliminary analyses. This step raises the validity of the data and confirms that participants' voices are precisely portrayed. It also illustrates the study's adherence to collaborative knowledge construction, where participants are honoured as partners rather than subjects.

The protocol is additionally in line with national and institutional ethical guidelines for research on human subjects. The protocol demonstrates a commitment to cultural sensitivity, with an awareness that ethical necessities must be translated within the framework of local values and norms. By means of the integration of ethics at every stage of the research, the study demonstrates respect for the communities with which it operates and contributes to best practice in conflict studies.

3.6. Limitations of the Study

This study of the Anthropological Approach to Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Rivers State is centered on Rivers State despite meticulous design, thereby rendering findings context-specific to this environment and possibly restricting their generalizability to other environments. The findings may not be generalizable to the whole Niger Delta region in Nigeria since the Niger Delta region has some states with varying cultural and sociopolitical features.

Once more, particularly in handling delicate matters such as conflict, data collected from interviews are susceptible to participant biases such as social desirability and selective recall. These biases can undermine the reliability and validity of the findings.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research issue, some respondents, particularly youth involved in peacebuilding or community leadership, may be hard to access or not willing to participate. Having only partial access to key informants can cause a lack of insight or decrease the representativeness of the research. Such limits are identified here, with efforts being undertaken through the method described in this chapter to circumvent them.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter lays out findings from the study under relevant themes and discusses them in relation to the specific objectives of this research. Themes are carefully structured and intricately woven to reveal patterns in participants' narratives and how they relate to the specific study objectives. As established in chapter three, the study pulled insight from 30 participants drawn from across the study area.

4.1 Understanding of Conflict and Local Realities

During the interviews, the respondents provided vivid and deeply personal accounts of how they perceive conflict in their communities, not simply narrating its visible expressions but following it to its root causes and describing how it tints the fabric of everyday life in Rivers State. For most of the respondents, conflict is not conceptualized as a one-time occurrence but as a continuous process abetted by history, economic disparity, political marginalization, and competition for natural resources, and most importantly, land and oil. The accounts revealed that conflict is part of the social fabric of the region, and it impacts family, clan, and ethnic relationships.

Some of the respondents identified the origin of conflicts as rooted in years of bitter resentment at land ownership and environmental damage caused by oil extraction. The majority lamented that extraneous factors, such as oil companies and government authorities, intruded on customary modes of land use, creating tensions that spill over into intercommunal conflict. A male elder remembers this path in history, pointing to the way economic interests tied to oil have driven suspicion and violence between groups:

"Before the oil companies came, our people were living together, farming and fishing peacefully. But when there was oil, foreigners started coming, and the government also began to take sides. This created hatred among brothers and sisters. Today, people don't quarrel just over land, but over who gets to wield the power associated with it." (Male, 72, Elder, 2025)

Participants also referred to mechanisms through which joblessness and poverty, especially youth unemployment, are drivers and consequences of conflict. Youths in most societies are considered victims as well as perpetrators of violence. They are often recruited by violent groups or politicized by political parties during campaign periods, resulting in cycles of insecurity that are difficult to break. A youth leader described how desperation sets young men into patterns of destruction:

"Most of the young men in this community don't have work. Politicians and the oil industry use them when they need them, to fight, to intimidate people. And then they abandon them. The frustrations linger, and they lead to inter-communal fighting. This is how violence is sustained here." (Male, 31, Youth Leader, 2025)

Though these external influences were frequently referenced, internal pressures within groups were also discussed by speakers. Conflict is also generated due to leadership struggles, power struggles over who follows whom, and squabbling for access to scarce resources like arable land and seawater. Traditional institutions, which historically provided stability and guidance, were reported by some to be undermined through corruption or politics. A woman leader expressed her concern at the loss of faith in traditional leaders:

"Before, our chiefs and elders were greatly respected. They were obeyed, and the fights subsided soon. But now, leaders are more driven by politics and money. If they take sides, the fight gets worse because people don't believe that the system will treat them fairly." (Female, 48, Women Leader, 2025)

The interviews also revealed how conflict disrupts the normal rhythm of daily life, creating fear, insecurity, and displacement. The participants justified the emotional price of living in a state of permanent uncertainty where even small disagreements turn violent. Women specifically mentioned the impact on families and children, describing how conflict destroys the social structures that traditionally support caregiving and communal cohesion. One mother of four described how the home has been affected:

"When there is fighting, the children are unable to go to school, and people scatter. We run into the bush or to other villages, not knowing when we might

return. Even in peaceful times, the fear is always there, looming over us like a shadow." (Female, 42, Trader, 2025)

Accounts from participants also shed light on how recollections of the past affect current understandings of conflict. The majority of the elders recalled in the past when communities had coexisted in harmony and cooperation and contrasted these with the present more volatile environment. These are both a source of wistfulness and a reminder of what has been lost. They give others a glimpse of what peace could look like if societies could resolve ongoing challenges. An older farmer recounted these shifts:

"In those good old days, if you had an issue, families would sit under the tree and talk until they reached a decision. There was respect and harmony. Now, people run to the politicians or the police, and it creates anger. We lost our way." (Male, 74, Farmer, 2025)

Their combined effect is a picture of conflict as deeply rooted and multifaceted, driven by external pressures, internal divisions, and the breakdown of ancient structures of authority. Conflict is not just seen as discrete eruptions of violence but also as an underlying undertone that permeates social relations, economic activity, and personal well-being.

4.2 Traditional Leadership in Conflict Resolution

One of the dominant themes running across the interviews was the role played by traditional leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding within Rivers State communities. Respondents routinely designated chiefs, elders, heads of lineages, and other customary authority-holders as the first resort to which people turn in the face of conflict. Such leaders are mediators to many respondents but also officials of cultural persistence and group identity, endowed with the wisdom, moral principles, and ancestral right to settle disputes in ways consistent with local values.

Participants emphasized that traditional leaders are usually the first port of call in all conflicts, whether regarding land disputes, family conflict, inter-clan rivalry, or succession battles within chieftaincy. Their existence is based on communal values and ritual culture, and thus, their

intervention is more acceptable to disputants than formal state-established processes. An elderly elder explained how his society naturally resorts to traditional leaders to re-establish the harmony:

"Whenever we have an issue, we don't go to the police first. We ask our chiefs and elders to sit down with the two sides and discuss. The elders know our background, they know the families involved, and they can speak in a way that people will listen to. That is how we keep our society together." (Male, 69, Elder, 2025)

Conflict resolution approaches were found to be mostly participatory and public and take the form of communal gatherings where disputants complain, witnesses testify, and wise older men deliberate appropriate settlements. These centers are less formal but symbolically expressive, reaffirming community responsibility for peace and the moral values of society. One young leader encapsulated a recent mediation process he had observed:

"Then our leader convened a meeting when there were two families that were fighting over land. Everyone came. Men, women, even young people. They listened very carefully to both sides and, after praying and deliberating, they agreed on what was acceptable. The leader ended with a blessing, and everyone broke a kola nut to seal the agreement. It was a healing of a family." (Male, 32, Youth Leader, 2025)

Many of the respondents emphasized the religious nature of traditional leadership in conflict resolution. Traditional leaders not only serve as administrators but also as intermediaries between the living and the dead, relying on spiritual powers to legitimate their decisions. Rituals such as libation, prayer, and symbolic sacrifice dominate most reconciliation processes, reaffirming the holiness of the peace pact. The meaning of these spiritual rituals is, according to a traditional leader, as follows:

"When we resolve conflict, it is not so much about talking. We call in our ancestors to witness and bless what we are doing. Otherwise, the resolution would not hold because people feel they must think that higher powers are at play. It lends strength to the decisions that we make." (Male, 61, Traditional Leader, 2025)

Participants also intimated the advantages of conventional leadership mechanisms, most notably their proximity, quickness, and local relevance. In contrast to official state courts that

are sometimes seen as far, slow, and costly, conventional systems are built into ordinary community routine. Several informants pointed out that this nearness can build trust and consent. A woman farmer expressed this view:

"If you go to the government court, you will lose money and time, and you may not even hear what they are saying. But when our elders handle it, they will do it quickly and in a language that all of us can comprehend. People will be more willing to accept because it appears as though our own system." (Female, 45, Farmer, 2025)

However, tensions and issues in the role of traditional leaders were also revealed through the interviews. Corruption, partisanship, and political interference were some of the concerns expressed by a few of the participants. In certain cases, traditional leaders were referred to as taking sides with powerful families, political elites, or external actors such as oil companies, thereby discrediting their legitimacy. One of the youth interviewees revealed his revulsion at what he perceived as the loss of integrity for some leaders:

"Before, our leaders were servants to the people, but nowadays some of them serve themselves. They take bribes or gifts and decide based on who gives them more. This generates more conflict because the people no longer trust what they say." (Male, 29, Youth Representative, 2025)

Despite such flaws, participants were near-unanimous in emphasizing the need for traditional leaders in peacebuilding. Even skeptics of particular practices acknowledged that communities would otherwise be denied an indispensable process for conflict resolution. Their close familiarity with history, relationships, and culture in communities places them in the best position to resolve conflict in ways that are familiar to the participants. One young participant put it like this:

"Elders are like the roots of a tree. Even if the branches are weak or broken, we still need the roots to support the tree. Without them, the whole society would collapse." (Male, 26, Youth, 2025)

The theme is indicative of the challenging and often ambiguous role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. On the one hand, such leaders provide accessible, culturally embedded

mechanisms for reconciliation and social cohesion. On the other hand, their effectiveness can be jeopardized by corruption, marginalization, and outside pressures.

4.3 Cultural Practices and Rituals of Reconciliation

Another recurring theme across participants' narratives was the significance of cultural rituals and practices to reconciliation and peace-building efforts in Rivers State. Participants noted that rituals are crucial to providing guarantees for the sustainability of peace pacts. Without them, even highly negotiated settlements can collapse because they do not have the cultural sanction required to pledge people to their promises. The way rituals work as a bridge between the material and spiritual planes was explained by one of the elders as a means to make reconciliation meaningful and binding:

"When you have discord, words will not heal the wound. We must perform the proper rituals to show that both sides are truly committed to peace. We take our elders to witness the process, and they bless us on our way. Otherwise, the wound would always be open, and the discord would recur." (Male, 74, Elder, 2025)

The most publicized is the reconciliation ceremony, which is public and performed either in the town square or another holy location. The ceremonies are very participatory and involve not only the disputing parties but also elders, religious leaders, women, youths, and other community members. By symbolic acts like the sharing of kola nuts, the offering of libations, or gift-giving, these rituals symbolically announce the cessation of hostilities and the renewal of social relationships. A village elder told of a recent ceremony that helped settle an old land dispute:

"Two families had been fighting over land for years, and there was too much bitterness. When the dispute was finally resolved, both sides sat down together in front of the whole community. They broke kola nuts and wine, and the ancestors were offered a libation. They danced and sang together. Nobody has ever mentioned the conflict again since then because the reconciliation was comprehensive." (Male, 58, Community Leader, 2025)

These rituals frequently involve cleansing ceremonies, which are intended to cleanse away spiritual pollution or "bad blood" of violence and enmity. These rituals are essential because

they confront the intangible effects of war so that the community can continue without continued spiritual damage. One of our traditional leaders explained the need for these practices:

"Conflict causes filth. Hatred and anger are like poison that will kill a community if they are not purified. That is why we have purification rituals to cleanse these away. Without purification, even though people say they have made up, the bad feelings remain, and they will come back later on." (Male, 66, Traditional Leader, 2025)

The place of communal festivities and celebrations was also perceived by participants as a reconciliatory strategy. Certain cultural festivals are strategically employed to engender oneness through uniting the community in shared festivities and commemoration. Symbolic gestures of solidarity and pardon are incorporated into dance, song, and performance during these celebrations.

Cultural symbols and stories also play an equally important role in peacebuilding, participants explained. Stories, proverbs, and songs convey lessons of harmony, respect, and responsibility for each other. They solidify the underlying values of reconciliation by making peace not just a political agreement but a cultural necessity. One youth leader spoke of how stories can prevent things from escalating into further conflict:

Our seniors teach us through stories about the risks of hatred and the value of togetherness. These stories remain with us, so if anger surfaces, we recall the lessons and think twice before we act. This is how culture promotes peace." (Male, 28, Youth Leader, 2025)

But there were also problems with the long-term effectiveness of cultural traditions. People were worried that modernization, urbanization, and foreign influences were eroding traditional rituals. Youth were particularly identified as not being so devoted to these traditions, sometimes even perceiving them as old-fashioned or irrelevant. One female respondent lamented this:

"Previously, everyone understood what our rituals were. Today, some young people ridicule them or refuse to take part. They prefer the new ones, but the new ones don't always result in enduring peace. Without our traditions, we will lose our ability to heal as a community." (Female, 44, Farmer, 2025)

This theme shows that any effort to build durable peace in Rivers State must proceed with and respect these cultural origins, recognizing their possible capacity to heal the past and create a more peaceful future.

4.4 Social Structures and Collective Peacebuilding

The attendees repeatedly emphasized that social structures within communities are essential to collective peace-building endeavors. Structures such as age-grade associations, women's groups, youth networks, and other community-based organizations, among others, provide the social glue that binds individuals together and allows for opportunity for dialogue, cooperation, and mutual support during and in the aftermath of conflict. Age-grade associations were one of the most prominent and historically rooted social organizations to be referenced by informants. These are groups consisting of members of about the same age group, and they have previously been employed as a means of communal work, the preservation of social order, and the instigation of responsibility among members. Informants described how age-grade associations are typically called upon to resolve conflicts before they escalate into full-fledged wars. One elder man explained their significance:

"In our society, the age-grade groups form the pillar of peace. In case of strife between families, the group closest to the parties involved will handle it first. They talk to both sides in low tones and tell them about their mutual responsibilities. Most often, this stops the issue from growing." (Male, 68, Elder, 2025)

Women's groups were also highlighted as central peacebuilders, especially in post-conflict environments where communities and families must recover and heal. Women hold important roles as carers, teachers, and mediators, and typically work behind the scenes to enable reconciliation. Various respondents discussed how women's groups use shared activities, for instance, communal cooking, song, and storytelling, to establish solidarity and open and safe spaces for discussion. A woman's leader described how her organization allowed for the coalition of two rival groups:

"When men were still at war, women started meeting in secret. We ate together and prayed together, even with women on the other side. Step by step, this created trust. When it was time for reconciliation to happen in the open, the relationships we had formed made it possible." (Female, 49, Women Leader, 2025)

Youth networks, in turn, were both a threat and an opportunity. The majority of participants acknowledged that youth are typically at the center of violent conflict, either as combatants, political thugs, or engaging in intercommunal violence. At the same time, however, youth networks also hold great potential as peacebuilders if their energies are harnessed constructively. A youth leader reported on efforts to organize youth for constructive roles:

"They are the heartbeat of this community. If they're not working, they can be mobilized for violence. But if they're mobilized, they can build peace. We do sports competitions, music festivals, and clean-up events to give them purpose. People get brought together with these events, and frustration decreases." (Male, 29, Youth Leader, 2025)

They noted that these social institutions usually work in concert, especially during times of crisis. For instance, if there is an outburst of violence in a particular region, the age-grade associations will provide security, the women's associations will assist displaced homes, and youth networks will assist in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure. All these communitarian efforts give a sense of collective responsibility and resilience, sustaining the social adhesive that holds peace together. A cultural leader described such a coordinated effort following a bloody battle between two neighboring villages:

"Everyone had a role to play after the war. The age-grade sets had defended the village, the women were cooking and caring for the wounded, and the youth helped in the building of houses. This proved that peace is not just the work of the leaders but that of everyone." (Male, 63, Traditional Leader, 2025)

Another pervading theme in participants' narratives was the preventive role of social structures. The majority of respondents highlighted that such organizations do not merely respond to violence after its occurrence but rather engage in a proactive effort to prevent tensions from escalating. For example, women's groups would monitor tensions developing in families, while

youth leaders would organize talks between conflicting parties before minor disagreements escalate into violence. One female respondent explained:

"Wives see the signs of trouble early because we know the households. We see there's trouble and round up the women and talk to them quietly. If we do it quickly enough, the issue can be addressed before it becomes a big issue."
(Female, 46, Farmer, 2025)

While they are supportive, the participants also noted problems that undermine the efficacy of social formations. Inadequacies in resources were a common mention, and most groups lacked the material as well as financial resources to sustain their operations. Additionally, factionalism in these groups on occasion mirrors the broader conflicts in the community, undermining their collective action. A disillusioned youth leader bemoaned these challenges:

"Sometimes even our groups are split along political or ethnic lines. When that's what happens, it is hard to be together for peace. We need to be united among ourselves before we can bring peace to others." (Male, 27, Youth Leader, 2025)

Gender dynamics were also a recurring theme, with women's work often being devalued or rendered invisible. Even though women have important roles in healing and reconciliation, they are often excluded from official decision-making circles dominated by men. Here is a quote from one woman leader:

"Men are always considered to be the peace-makers, but it is women who hold the community intact after the war. We construct the homes, comfort the children, and reunite the families. But when the decisions are being made, there is no voice of ours." (Female, 52, Women Leader, 2025)

Panelists emphasized that external assistance can reinforce social institutions, especially if NGOs or government institutions conduct training, grants, or forums for discussion. However, they warned that external intervention must be done respecting local customs and in partnership, and not through top-down measures. One civil servant said, reflecting on the need for a balance:

"Outside groups can perhaps help, but they first need to listen to their people. If they disrespect our social customs, they will not succeed. Real peace is with working off a base already built." (Male, 48, Civil Servant, 2025)

The narratives demonstrate the way in which social structures are not just reactive aspects of society but working forces for change. Their practice is in accordance with the principles of Conflict Transformation Theory, which focuses on addressing relationships, social systems, and cultural dynamics as well as specific conflicts. Through mutual support, dialogue, and collective action, these groups create conditions for enduring peace.

Generally, the witness accounts suggest that social structures are the oxygen of peacebuilding in Rivers State. They operate at the level of the grassroots, where conflict is most primitive and where the seeds of reconciliation must be planted. While challenges such as resource scarcity and exclusion persist, these structures are powerful instruments of collective healing and transformation. As one of the elders explained briefly:

"Peace cannot be imposed from outside. Peace grows from the hands of people who live here. Youth, women, and age-grades are the branches of a tree. If they work together, they offer protection to the whole society." (Male, 70, Elder, 2025)

This is an important theme that points out that sustainable peace takes more than elite negotiations; it needs the vigilant involvement of various community institutions that work in tandem to rebuild confidence, mend relationships, and strengthen resilience.

4.5 Inclusion and Marginalization in Indigenous Peace Processes

The majority of the interviewees discussed how men, particularly elders and traditional leaders, control reconciliation ceremonies and peace negotiations. These leaders are regarded as authentic custodians of cultural power, which equates to the power to speak and make decisions on behalf of the populace. While the participants acknowledged the historical and symbolic significance of these leaders, they also complained that this overlap of power leaves other groups outside. One of the women's leaders expressed dismay:

Whenever there's conflict, it's women who suffer most. We protect the children, we cower with the wounded, and we reconstruct the homes after the conflict is finished. But then, when there is a sit-down to discuss peace, women aren't invited to speak.

Women just cook for men and sing at rituals." We are not taken into account, despite shouldering the heaviest burden." (Female, 51, Women Leader, 2025)

This exclusion of women was a common refrain during interviews. Responses cited that women's peacebuilding takes place in informal and unseen settings, such as homes and networks of acquaintances, and not in official decision-making circles. Women act as family mediators, healers to the wounded, and quiet architects of trust between lines opposing each other, and they are not usually appreciated or respected in public life. One young woman made this point thus:

"We saw tensions rising between two villages, and we understood that if nothing was done, blood would be shed. So we went to the mothers on both sides and persuaded them to speak to their sons. We spoke, we cooled things down, but nobody paid attention to this work. The men afterwards had a massive meeting and took credit for peace." (Female, 30, Youth Representative, 2025)

Youth were also a group said to be continuously excluded from peace processes, although they were at the heart of the conflict dynamics. The attendees noted that young people are not always viewed as anything but troublemakers or fighters, and not as stakeholders with valuable opinions. They are called upon for violence in politics or communal conflicts but are never consulted to contribute to solutions. A youth leader lamented about the process:

"It's the youths that are killed and fight in such wars, but when peace must be negotiated, they do it like we are children and must just obey. Elders and politicians make decisions, and orders are directed to us. This gets most youths bitter because they feel utilized and discarded." (Male, 27, Youth Leader, 2025)

Others linked the exclusion of women and youth to deeply ingrained cultural conventions that ascribe power based on gender and age. Such conventions set up a hierarchy by which certain voices are privileged over others. While these traditions are of historical importance, they could also contribute to inequalities that negate participatory peacebuilding. One of the male elders explained the paradox:

"In our society, we highly respect the elderly, and that is good because it keeps things disciplined. But sometimes it also means that women and youth cannot even talk, even when they have good ideas. We need to learn to respect our culture and yet listen to everyone." (Male, 70, Elder, 2025)

This thread highlights that the challenge of peacebuilding within Rivers State is not just stopping violence but creating institutions that recognize and empower the total array of stakeholders in society. By raising the voices of women, youth, and marginalized groups, peace processes can become more inclusive, stable, and transformative.

4.6 Interaction Between Indigenous and Formal Institutions

A pervasive theme that cut across interviews was the complex interplay between state formal institutions and indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution. Most of the respondents emphasized that indigenous processes are the first choice by default for the majority of the local conflicts. Elders, traditional leaders, and family heads are consulted to settle differences because they are readily available, within reach, and culturally acceptable. These platforms are based on the common histories, rituals, and moral authority, which are utilized to develop post-resolution consensus. One traditional leader described why indigenous processes were the most preferred approach:

"Whenever there is conflict, the people come to us first because they trust us. We know the families, the history, and the tradition. We not only resolve the conflict; we repair the relationships. The government courts can't because they don't understand our ways." (Male, 65, Traditional Leader, 2025)

But they also knew that the local systems have their limits, especially in cases involving outside parties such as oil companies, government employees, or rival groups beyond the reach of local authority. Formal institutions are then generally called upon to intervene with legalization or enforcement. A civil servant laid out the need for state involvement in these broader conflicts:

"Few of the conflicts go beyond the community, like when they are between multinational companies or between ethnic groups. In such situations, the government must intervene because we have the legal system and materials to handle them. But even then, we do attempt to work with the traditional leaders so that the people are in line with the decision." (Male, 47, Civil Servant, 2025)

This dual reliance on informal and formal mechanisms holds the promise for cooperation when both acknowledge and respect the other's strengths. Several participants provided illustrations

of successful hybrid solutions where mediation was combined with state enforcement and resulted in durable solutions. A woman's leader provided one illustration from a case of boundary conflict between two families:

"The elders from both sides gathered and discussed the matter and reached a consensus. The community elders were the mediators who made this possible. Their authority gave it the backing of the law, ensuring that both parties comply with agreements reached." (Female, 52, Women Leader, 2025)

Despite such positive examples, most of the participants highlighted the tensions and lack of trust that tend to predominate between indigenous and formal institutions. State actors were constantly feared to undermine or overlook traditional arrangements as illegitimate or antiquated. This has the potential to stir up resentment and resistance among individuals from communities. Here is what a young leader had to say about it:

"When the government comes in, they assume that our ways are uncivilized. They decide without listening to us, and people get angry. Even if their solution is good, it would fail because the community feels belittled." (Male, 29, Youth Leader, 2025)

These tensions are aggravated by political interference, in that politicians or outsiders co-opt some of the traditional leaders and lose their credibility and independence. Actors cited instances where government officials used their authority to bend traditional procedures to political or personal ends. A farmer lamented how this has eroded trust in both systems:

"Chiefs are no longer impartial because they take sides with politicians or corporations. There is a lowering of trust in the community arrangement. But people do not trust the government, so there is no place to turn for justice." (Male, 54, Farmer, 2025)

Participants also referred to jurisdictional conflicts between the two institutions. In some cases, disputes settled by traditional means are reopened in formal courts afterward, creating confusion and rendering community agreements invalid. Such inefficiency may lead to frustration as well as the recurrence of conflict. A civil servant clarified the issue:

"Sometimes it's solved by the elders, but one of the parties is not satisfied and goes to the government court. If the court decides differently, it creates conflict

once again. We need to have more guidelines on how the two systems are going to interact with each other." (Male, 50, Civil Servant, 2025)

Another challenge raised by participants includes the marginalization of indigenous voices from state-led peace-building initiatives. Government programs and policies are typically formulated without genuine consultation with local populations, and therefore, interventions remain irrelevant to culture or community support. One woman leader described how foreigners sometimes circumvent locals' expertise:

"Government and NGOs have their agendas, but they don't take the time to learn our way. They have workshops and put out reports, but the issues remain because they don't work with the people who know the community the most." (Female, 48, Women Leader, 2025)

These insights emphasize the reality that sustainable peace in Rivers State depends upon building respectful partnerships between indigenous and formal systems, where local knowledge and cultural legitimacy are blended within forms of governance and justice.

4.7 Pathways for Sustainable Peace and Recommendations

A common thread running through the narratives was that peace must begin at the community level, grounded in realities on the ground and initiated by those most affected by conflict. Many of the respondents emphasized that sustainable peace cannot be imposed from outside but must germinate organically internally, making use of the strengths of local customs and people systems. This was encapsulated by a traditional leader:

"Real peace will not come through the government. It must start with the villagers, with our traditions and with our relationships. Outsiders can help, but they must work from what already exists." (Male, 67, Traditional Leader, 2025)

The participants envisioned a model of peacebuilding that incorporates traditional and formal systems, creating a hybrid model that is structurally credible and culturally legitimate. It reflects the values of Conflict Transformation Theory, where the focus is on addressing the underlying relationships, cultural scripts, and systemic disadvantages that lead to conflict. Communities can now generate solutions that are both authentic and enforceable with the moral

power of traditional leaders augmented by state capacity and legal tools. One civil servant once described this ideal partnership:

"We must respect our traditions but also ensure that decisions are made based on the law. If the government and elders collaborate, no one will be left behind, and peace will prevail." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, 2025)

One of the most urgent recommendations put forward by interviewees was for greater involvement in peace processes. The majority of interviewees stressed that women, youth, and marginalized groups must be given genuine opportunities to participate in decision-making. This is not merely an ethic of justice but one of pragmatism as well, since these constituencies are likely to possess peculiar insights into the causes of conflict and the dynamics of reconstruction. A woman's leader voiced eloquently:

"Peace cannot be made by men alone. Women are the ones who bind families together, who heal the wounds of war. If our voices are not heard, the solutions will be incomplete, and the problems will return." (Female, 51, Women Leader, 2025)

This view was captured by representatives of the youth, who argued that youth should not just be seen as agents of violence but also as major agents of peace. Various participants suggested the formation of youth peace councils and training programs to channel the energy of the youth into positive functions. A youth leader described how this could change people's lives within the community:

"When young people have a purpose, they bring life to the community instead of chaos. We need training, jobs, and a seat at the table. That way, we can use our power for building instead of brawling." (Male, 28, Youth Leader, 2025)

Participants consistently highlighted addressing the root causes of conflict, rather than settling for shallow skin-deep differences. Most Rivers State conflicts relate to structural issues such as competition for resources, environmental degradation, and political marginalization. Respondents said that unless the root causes are tackled, peace will be fragile. A farmer referenced the relation between conflict and resource management:

"Rivers and land are our existence, but they are being killed. When individuals fight, it is because they feel cheated or overlooked. When the government safeguards our surroundings and the resources are distributed equally, no one will have a reason to fight." (Male, 54, Farmer, 2025)

This focus on structural justice was complemented by calls for economic empowerment. Several interviewees mentioned unemployment and poverty, especially among the youth, as a fertile breeding ground for violence. Providing sustainable livelihoods was seen as important in breaking the cycle of war. One leader of the women gave a straightforward prescription:

"If there were jobs and opportunities, our young men would not be used by gangs or politicians. Economic empowerment is the solution to peace." (Female, 47, Women Leader, 2025)

Education was also identified as one of the other areas that must be prioritized in the establishment of enduring peace. Working members argued that schools provide young people with applicable skills for the future while simultaneously providing a space for inculcating values of tolerance, cooperation, and conflict resolution. A retired educator captured this thus:

"When our schools were destroyed, it was like our future had been stolen. In an effort to build peace, we must rebuild our schools and teach the next generation how to coexist peacefully." (Male, 63, Retired Teacher, 2025)

Several called for increased accountability mechanisms to avert impunity and ensure that perpetrators of violence face the book. If impunity is not avoided, they argued, in the absence of justice, reconciliation would be an empty charade, and revenge cycles would continue. And it is not merely punitive justice, but also strategic restorative justice focused on healing and reintegration. A community leader illustrated how accountability and forgiveness could thrive together:

"Those who hurt need to acknowledge the harm they did and be held accountable, but they also need a way back into the community. If we just punish, the wounds grow deeper. If we forgive but don't hold people accountable, the wounds become infected. We need a balance." (Male, 60, Community Leader, 2025)

The actors also provided very practical recommendations on how the convergence of the formal and traditional systems could be facilitated. These included establishing regular forums within which government administrators and traditional leaders can work together in coordinating and monitoring peace-building efforts and providing legal recognition to traditional mediation procedures. These measures would eliminate duplication of effort and reduce conflict between the two systems. A civil servant emphasized the imperative for this coordination:

"When working on our own, we are failing. But when the government and traditional leaders are in a sitting conference, we can utilize our strengths and avoid misinterpreting each other." (Male, 50, Civil Servant, 2025)

This theme highlights that peace is neither a fixed result nor a destination but a constant process of change that needs constant effort, cooperation, and commitment on the part of local communities and external actors. Listening to these voices and acting on their suggestions is achievable in being able to break away from conflict cycles towards a future of enduring harmony in Rivers State.

4.8 Discussion of Findings

This section critically positions the findings considering the study's goals and in the context of contemporary academic discourse. The discussion is structured in relation to the two core aims, contrasting participants' accounts and experiences with extant theoretical concepts and empirical studies to foreground convergence, complexity, and new insight.

4.8.1 Objective 1: How Traditional Leadership Institutions and Local Conflict

Resolution Models Facilitate Peacebuilding

The findings from qualitative interviews show a dominance of traditional leadership in the peacebuilding and conflict management process. In all the interviews, participants always mentioned chiefs, elders, councils, and heads of lineage as the immediate response to conflict situations, citing them as the custodians of communal identity, the carriers of oral traditions,

and the bearers of moral authority whose statements continue to be obeyed by society in most instances. These actors were not perceived as ceremonial figureheads in the expression of respondents but as practical conduits of conversation and reconciliation, and their eminence was explained by the fact that they are a part of the local culture, are close to the disputants, and are in a position to comprehend grievances through the idioms of local history and kinship.

Another reason for such a strong preference towards indigenous institutions is due to the perceived benefits of the local mechanisms, especially that of speed, accessibility, affordability, and that it is applicable to the local reality. The option of elders and chiefs was shown by participants as an instrumentally rational action within the environment of their daily action, and made it clear that the traditional institutional forms are simpler to reach than the formal courts, quicker to constitute hearings, and more intelligible since the proceedings occur in familiar environments and languages known by the disputants. This was compared by a woman farmer to the state court process, where the court process takes money and time, and may not even be linguistically intelligible, but when non-legal experts take a dispute, it is resolved promptly and in a language that all of them can understand, making them more willing to accept the result as their own system. The peace-building implication is that such mechanisms minimize the chances of escalation of the dispute that might take place in a situation whereby the parties are caught in expensive or time-consuming processes, and the fact that it allows early intervention during the stage of the conflict, whereby dialogue and social pressure are still effective to contain the escalation process.

There are also testimonies that in Rivers State, indigenous dispute resolution is extensively organized with regard to public discourse and consensus-making, which enhances obedience by rendering results socially observed and owned by everyone. The participants talked about community meetings where the disputants submit their grievances, witnesses are called, and esteemed elders negotiate settlements that are meant to be acceptable to the rest of the

community and not just supposed to be favorable to one party. One of the youth leaders shared a land dispute mediation experience in which all parties, men, women, and the young people attended, and the leader listened to both sides and engaged in prayer and deliberation. Upon this, the leader concluded with prayer and a blessing, breaking a kola nut to complete the agreement, which he termed as healing a family. This trend can be viewed as a restorative spirit designating social repair and reintegration into punitive sanctioning, reinstating the restorative focus of numerous indigenous conflict management practices in Nigeria (Ajayi and Buhari, 2014; Kpae, 2018; Otite and Albert, 2001).

These results confirm the common academic assumption that traditional leadership organizations seek the legitimacy of cultural embeddedness and participatory modalities and provide moral orders and ritual forms of reconciliation as opposed to technical conflict resolution viewed as a technical resolution of claims (Lederach, 1997; Kpae, 2018). Legitimacy in the research societies was recurrently characterized as that which is enacted and actualized by communal attendance, open discussion, and adherence to accepted rites of closure; authority is enforced not just by position, but also by communal processes, which appeal to a collective value system. This can be used to explain the reason why the participants, time and again, framed chiefs and elders as the protectors of communal justice, as justice was not encompassed as punishment but rather a socially acceptable means of restoration of normalcy, leading to further coexistence in an environment where relationships and reputations have long been preserved even after a dispute has been resolved.

Here, ritual role comes out as symbolic and functional in achieving peace-building results. Regarding legitimacy, there are also the results of the interview that the source of legitimacy is frequently found in the observance of the rites like joint kola nuts, ancestral libations, and open-air blessings, which participants stated as a key to sealing deals in the collective imagination and the perception of the resolutions being moral. A traditional leader clarified that in solving

conflicts, it is not just about speaking but summoning ancestors to be present and bless the process, as without the feeling that the higher forces are at play, the solution will not stick, and that spiritual sanction is a culturally accepted enforcement mechanism that reinforces the peace commitment. This is consistent with anthropological knowledge that the indigenous mechanisms can be used to facilitate peace through prioritizing social reconciliation and also giving patterned outlets through which the aggression can be directed into a controlled process by human social plasticity that replaces the rule of force with patterns that focus on cooperation and restorative justice (Fry, 2007).

The restorative quality of conventional leadership, as it is demonstrated by the stories of the participants, can thus be understood as a systematic method of mending the bonds of social relationships instead of merely identifying blame. The participants were reiterating that elders are aware of the families involved and can talk with authority influenced by history, kinship, and social requirements, which means that traditional mediation tends to have a focus towards restoring trust, as well as ensuring that parties can co-exist on the other side of the conflict. The reasoning of this strategy was explained by one of the older members of the community where the particular community does not even approach the police but rather needs to involve chiefs and older people in a meeting where both parties are represented so that the elders can discuss the matter since they are aware of the background and can talk in a manner that will be heard and that is how they maintain their society. This reinforces the general argumentative position that indigenous leadership is usually a moderating power that stabilizes the life of the community by creating settlements, which are socially intelligible and relationally sustainable, and not necessarily procedurally correct.

Meanwhile, the results demonstrate that traditional leadership is not a solitary local peace infrastructure that works independently, but it is connected to a network of community institutions, including age-grade associations, youth groups, market women's associations, and

religious organizations. These structures, according to participants, were referred to as mediators, consensus-builders, early warning systems, and enforcers of social norms, which means that peacebuilding in Rivers State is often a group effort that brings a number of layers of authority as well as social organization into play. This is noteworthy since it implies that the efficacy of traditional leadership relies partially on its capacity to gather and organize these structures, and on their readiness to support agreements by social regulation in their everyday activities. Following conflict transformation thought, these actors may be interpreted as relational nodes that help to keep the peace in place by having crosscutting connections and by integrating dispute management into ongoing social processes as opposed to separating it into a one-time legal process (Lederach, 1997).

Nevertheless, the results of the study are also in compliance with critical scholarship because they show the tensions that jeopardize the validity and efficacy of customary authority. Some of the respondents mentioned corruption, foreign intervention, and biases in customary power, and linked them to the fears of elite capture, politicization of traditional institutions, and deteriorating respect of the youths towards customary power (Peterson, 2012; Ogbobe, 2022). One of the youth representatives mentioned that there were leaders who are serving themselves now, accepting bribes or gifts, and making their decisions according to how much the person gives them, and he pointed out that this is causing more conflict since people cannot trust anything the leaders say. The direct result of such perceptions is the diminution of the ethical basis of the indigenous authority, as the legitimacy in these systems is largely based on the perceived fairness, neutrality, and communal orientation, as opposed to formal enforcement ability.

Markedly, the findings also note that exclusion is a well-known phenomenon in the indigenous peace processes. Young individuals and women reported a low level of formal decision-making, indicative of heavy workload in conflict and post-conflict recovery, which is widely

deployed in the peace scholarship as undermining effectiveness and equity (Chandler, 2010; Peterson, 2012). It is argued that these problems may cause settlements to be poorly owned socially and may lack important information on the processes fueling the escalation of conflict, especially in situations where youth networks can affect mobilization, and in situations where women's economic and social positions place them as first responders in the daily tension management in their community. Participant accounts imply that to make a significant change in conflict response, there is a need to respect the cultural tradition and transform the exclusionary practices to ensure that peace agreements capture the reality of all stakeholders.

The research also indicates that corruption and exclusion may lead to erosion of trust that encourages disputants to seek alternative forums, which is a factor in the forum shopping phenomenon. Respondents would relate circumstances in which those who were not content with a conventional settlement would subsequently go to formal courts, and this would create contradictory results and a recurrence of conflict.

One of the civil servants stated that where the court makes a different decision than the elders, this would bring conflict back, and there must be clear guidelines as to how the systems should interrelate. This is an example of one of the main problems of plural justice settings. Lack of clarity of institutional boundaries and mutual recognition of decisions tends to cause the same dispute to continue spreading to forums, making the grievance persistent and therefore the finality that is needed for peacebuilding. The results thus support the fears of Oba that the strategic choice of venue can undermine the integrity and coherence of hybrid legal orders, particularly when parties select the institution to their benefit and not on merit (Oba, 2014).

One of the most remarkable contributions of the literature and the empirical data is the acknowledgment of the changing relations between the state-led and indigenous order that comprises both fruitful interactions and unceasing conflicts. The participants provided both

examples when traditional mediation proved to be durable in the presence of formal mechanisms like legalization or enforcement, and also frictions caused by conflict of jurisdiction, legal vagueness, and duplication of efforts, which validates the applicability of the hybrid peace-building frameworks, corroborating extant studies like those of Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013, 2015) and Oba (2014). One of the civil servants pointed out that when the government and the traditional leaders are on a coordinating platform, they can use their advantages, and they will not be misunderstood, and that institutional cooperation is not just a theory that is being reflected in the local context, but is being viewed as a need that is practical to use. Still, players have also mentioned that where the state actors are involved in community conflicts with an attitude of dismissal towards the local senses of doing things, this may lead the community to reject solutions even when technically viable, as perceived disrespect undermines the sense of legitimacy and cooperation, and hence recycling the very mistrust that perpetuates the conflict.

The local systems also tend to reach limits, as evidenced by the fact that conflicts involve external players like oil companies, government officials, or conflicts that extend beyond the jurisdiction of the community authority. In this scenario, participants clarified that formal institutions are frequently requested to offer the use of legal power, the enlargement of jurisdiction, and the resources towards enforcement, even though it is frequently stated that successful implementation is achieved by collaborating with traditional leaders to achieve compliance of the community. A civil servant remarked that when conflicts exceed community levels, the government must intervene based on legal and material capacity, but still, officials must attempt to negotiate with traditional leaders so that individuals conform to the decision, which is the practical rationale of hybrid possibilities. This confirms the implication of the study that state and customary systems do not operate in parallel enough and that obligatory coordination can enhance both legitimacy and enforceability, particularly with complex

conflicts that cannot be adequately covered by one institutional domain (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, 2015; Oba, 2014).

Although the criticisms have been documented in the results, the respondents were almost unanimous in their observation that the role of the traditional leaders cannot be downplayed in the peace-building process. Even the skeptics recognized that without elders and chiefs, the communities would lack an avenue with a ready, culturally legitimate means of managing conflicts based upon local histories and relationships, and one of the youth respondents said that elders were like the roots of a tree, that even when the branches were weak, the roots were required to hold the society together. This analogy describes the major conflict in the study. Traditional leadership is at once an establishment and a challenge, on one hand, and upon which it extensively depends; at the same time, it is subject to a loss of legitimacy due to commoditization, politicization, and exclusion. The peace-building dilemma, then, is not to glorify the indigenous mechanisms as being necessarily right, nor to replace them with state-centric models, but to reinforce their authenticity and at the same time make them agreeable in accordance with the demands of accountability and inclusion that are needed to sustain them over time.

4.8.2 Objective 2: The Role of Cultural Practices and Social Structures in Peace-building Outcome

Evidence presented above confirms that cultural activities such as reconciliation rituals, communal festivals, symbolic healing ceremonies, and feasting did not take a back seat but rather were at the center of the peacebuilding in the study communities. The participants did not define rituals as optional additions once an agreement is made, but as the channel through which peace is socially acknowledged, emotionally plausible, and publicly obligatory to members of the group, where relationships, reputation, and belonging are the primary commodities of daily existence. In the literature, rituals were recurrently posed as the moment

when peace is made real, since they not only confer abstract settlements into embodied gestures of forgiveness but also restore dignity to the wronged parties and imprint the settlement into the memory and collective identity.

A key observation from local voices is that moral and psychological closure can be reached through the performance of reconciliation in culturally significant ceremonies, which the language of negotiation or the legal paperwork can otherwise generally fail to accomplish. Participants indicated that hostility is justified by the rituals of reconciliation, prayers, libations, open blessings, and shared feasting as being over, and as having restored relationships between the parties to the conflict, and between the communities on which they bring reconciliation and which must bear the consequences. This is empirical support of theoretical assertions that contextually correct interventions will tend to foster increased levels of trust and compliance, as the construction of trust is not only via rational acceptance of the terms, but also joint practices that indicate that the conditions are genuine, responsible, and reintegrative (Lederach, 1997; Deng, 1995; Mac Ginty, 2011).

Such demands by the participants of spiritual rituals like libations and community celebrations also show that locally understood peacebuilding is an act that entails moral and cosmological healing as opposed to social bargaining. In the stories, war is often linked with uncleanness, spiritual danger, or community disequilibrium; hence, peace must be procured through a purification process that has the effect of returning the community to a stable state of moral being. These practices act as culturally approved verification systems, meaning that parties have not simply entered into an agreement under duress but have instead taken an obligation that is known to ancestors, elders, and witnesses to the community, and therefore assist in ensuring compliance based on the moral obligation and fear of social and spiritual consequences. Combined with anthropological explanations of human social plasticity and the ability of ritualized systems to replace violent self-redress with nonviolent process forms of

regulation, the results imply that rituals are institutional technologies that transform grievance into a nonviolent reconciliation and mitigate the perceived necessity of retaliation (Fry, 2007).

The evidence also indicates that cultural practices have a role to play in peace-building outcomes since they reconfigured narratives of the conflict and should also enlarge the symbolic space within which the opponents could rejoin community life without humiliation. Respondents explained that ceremonies and public events provide the means of confession, apology, and compromise to lessen the social costs of retreating and reduce the possibility of reconciliation that does not involve permanent stigma. This echoes the sentiment that peace is generated by altering social memory and reinventing violent imaginaries, as collective interpretation, which can be based on revenge, can be redirected to reintegration and a shared sense of belonging through the use of a public ritual (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001). In a sense, the ritual process does not simply laud peace, but re-establishes a sense of meaning, creates a common version of the conflict, and signals that the community is no longer polarized but is returning to a new morality.

In addition to ritual, the paper has found that through embedded social structures like women's associations, youth associations, and age grades, associations influence the outcome of peacebuilding significantly. Experience with interviews has provided certain emphasis regarding the fact that these structures are not peripheral to community peace, but are in fact amongst the most active operational weapons of local conflict management, and tend to perform the functions of mediators, informal investigators, early warning systems, and rapid response networks capable of quelling tensions before they grow out of hand. This trend is in line with the Social Capital Theory and other empirical studies that highlight the point that networks, norms, and trust can make collective action and mutual monitoring make communities cohesive and cooperative (Putnam, 2000; Adger, 2003; Onyx and Bullen, 2000).

The stories used in the research explain how these organizations produce bonding and bridging social capital through which cohesion is created. The bonding social capital can be seen in the mobilization of the women's groups or youth councils in their respective networks in the shortest time possible to halt rumors, isolate the fighting parties, or bring about moderation, thus offering instant containment and community sanctions. Brokerage, in the social capital bridging, occurs in cases where age grades and generational networks connect families, lineages, and competing groups using common civic responsibilities and community projects that establish crosscutting relationships that render violence economically and socially expensive. This echoes arguments that local associations are generally institutionalized facilitators across social boundaries, making them useful in negotiation, coordination, and reciprocity, particularly where the presence of the state is weak or mistrusted (Krishna & Uphoff, 2002; Belloni, 2001).

The empirical facts also indicate that the existence of these social structures promotes the process of peacebuilding not just by mediation but also by recovery and resilience during the post-conflict era. Participants also expressed that women's networks are of paramount importance to immediate welfare provision, caregiving, and the stabilization of households, and the youth groups as possible spoilers of peace and also as possible peace agents, depending on whether they are used constructively and with meaningful roles assigned to them. Age-grade associations were also defined as having the power to enforce decisions by communities, mobilize their labor towards communal reconstruction, and conduct active surveillance through informal surveillance, which implies that the results of peace will depend on what communities can do once an agreement is made, and not what they state during negotiations. Practically, the research shows that peace is made sustainable when these ordinary social infrastructures convert collective decisions into daily activities and practices that do not encourage a relapse into conflict.

Nevertheless, the evidence also substantiates a major conflict in the literature about inclusion practices being controversial and conflicting in many cases. Most of the women and youth stressed that they were left out in the mainstream decision-making arenas, yet their networks and informal labour provide most of the foundations for real peace and recovery. This reflects the scholarly warning that local agency respect does not eliminate internal inequalities or retrogressive traditions and that marginalization may cement existing inequalities or even form new fault lines, dislocation, which in effect destabilizes in the long term (Chandler, 2010; Peterson, 2012). Reforms demanded by the participants include the assurance of not only attendance at peace meetings but also actual impact in the course of determining, discussing, and implementing the agenda, which means that the achievements of peace are compromised when peace enforcers in the real sense are deprived of power in the official procedure.

The results also indicate that peace-building effectiveness has functional implications of exclusion. In the event women and youth are not effectively integrated, settlements can be unable to respond to the lived forces of conflict escalation, like dynamics of youth mobilization, household economic shocks, or daily patterns of insecurity, which women tend to deal with at the community level. The excluded people may also distrust the results and promote parallel mobilization, as the marginalized groups may withdraw their compliance or find other platforms for expressing their grievances, thus adding to the chances of fragmentation and new tension. In this respect, inclusion is not a rights matter, nor a durability matter, since broad-based ownership is reliant on substantive participation among social segments.

Moreover, this research paper agrees with scholarly views that even though traditional and cultural models are effective in solving identity-based and relationship-based conflicts, their applicability in conflicts that are scaled across societies or are instigated by competition for resources and external forces is lower. The issues mentioned by the participants include oil-induced wars and inter-border conflicts in which local mechanisms can begin the dialogue but

are not capable of producing results, controlling the influence of the powerful external interests, and delivering enforceable solutions across the borders. This helps to sustain the idea that state intervention is needed in some conflicts, especially those that need legal force, coercion, or the involvement of more people, rather than being limited within the moral sphere of a particular community (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015; Oba, 2014).

This fact helps put more weight on the growing argument in favor of hybrid structures that combine the local legitimacy with procedural benefits, safeguarding rights, and the scale of the formal institutions. These facts suggest that the hybrid strategies can make the peace-building process not only culturally resonant but also institutionally durable, yet also reveal that the design should be more intentional in order to ensure that the traditional rituals and social structures are not stripped of their significance as the substantive decisions are elsewhere. The experience of the participants suggests that hybrid practice is best suited to the case when it makes roles clear, the cultural work done by rituals and community associations is respected, and coordination channels are established to minimize institutional rivalry and confusion.

Together, the results indicate that the modern peace-building context of Rivers State is in line with the literature that calls for synthesis to keep the power of local rituals and social relations and to adopt the reforms and partnerships that enhance accountability, scalability, and meaningful involvement of all actors. Cultural practices are no longer conceived as folklore but as mechanisms that generate trust, closure, and compliance, whereas the social structures are considered as the daily infrastructure within which an agreement is enacted, and peace is reproduced. The main implication is that the sustainability of peace-building in Rivers State is most likely to occur when the cultural legitimacy and social capital are secured and reinforced by means of reforms of inclusion and by means of institutional collaboration designed in a way that will be able to manage the disputes that are beyond the local scale without compromising the local ownership.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the findings, draws a fitting conclusion, proposes recommendations, and notes the contributions of this study to knowledge.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study was conducted in Rivers State, where there have been frequent communal conflicts, intra-community conflicts, and intermittent violence, which have challenged the ability of both the formally established institutions and community-based mechanisms to ensure reconciliation and the long-term sustainability of peace. Rivers State is also a rather exemplary case since traditional authority systems continue to be socially active and relevant to daily governance, despite being supplemented by legal systems, security services, and contemporary political systems. This study was motivated by the fact that although the conflict has existed, peace-building efforts in the state have often been examined in terms of statist or security-based approaches that give preference to formal institutions, coercive enforcement, and short-term settling results. Conversely, the anthropological approaches focus on culture, lived experience, local agency, and relational repair, but scant empirical research has been conducted to methodically explore the way in which the approaches operate, their effectiveness, and their interplay with official state-based peace programs in Rivers State.

There was also a practical policy concern that led to the study. Although hybrid peace policies that involve integrating both customary and formal systems are theoretically advisable, their practical success is determined by the way the legitimacy, power, enforcement, and inclusion are compromised between indigenous organizations and the enacted laws. This interface has not been well defined in most Nigerian contexts and has not been institutionally aligned, creating tensions of jurisdiction, authority, and recognition. It is thus important to understand how such arrangements work and are experienced by local actors to gauge whether

anthropological peace-building policies actually promote reconciliation and sustainable peace or co-exist in an uneasy relationship with state structures.

It is in this context that the general objective of the research was to establish available anthropological strategies for peacebuilding in Rivers State and determine whether these strategies are effective in bringing reconciliation and long-term peace. With this goal in view, the research proposal was guided by two objectives. To begin with, it attempted to demonstrate the role of traditional institutions of leadership and local conflict resolution models in the task of peacebuilding in Rivers State and the interdependence of these two aspects with official state-based work. Second, it sought to explore how cultural practices and organizational social structures of local communities contribute to the realization of the results of peace-building activities and what lessons they would be applicable in elaborating the general approaches to conflict resolution in Nigeria. Achievement of these objectives was done with a perspective of explaining not only what works in local peacebuilding, but how, and under what social circumstances it generates legitimacy, compliance, and reconciliation.

The study used the conflict transformation theory as its main theoretical model. The reason behind the choice of this theoretical orientation is that it views conflict as a social process based on relationships, patterns of interaction, and structural conditions that need to be transformed over a long period of time to ensure that they do not recur. Conflict Transformation Theory is duly connected to anthropological views that put more emphasis on process, meaning, and lived experience. It focuses analytical resources on how the local actors define harm, bargain accountability, and mend the relationships using culturally rich practices as opposed to purely official legal reprimand or official institutional corrections. The theory offers a strong analytical perspective on explaining why some indigenous processes lead to compliance and reconciliation despite lacking formal law codification, whereas others fail when trust and

legitimacy are lost because it prefigures the relational repair, legitimacy, and social reintegration as a key result.

The research design used was a qualitative methodology to enable the study to capture depth, context, and meanings that actors give to peace-building practices in their communities. The data were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews with thirty respondents who were selected purposively because they had taken part in or had experience in community-level conflicts and dispute resolution processes. Snowball sampling was later applied to widen the sample size and reach those actors who would otherwise be difficult to reach, such as traditional leaders, group elders, youth leaders, representatives of women's groups, religious leaders, and people with lived experience of certain discordant situations. This structure allowed paying close attention to the way authority is enacted and recognized, how customary norms are understood and implemented in specific situations, and how local actors can evaluate the fairness of the procedure, its enforcement, and results. The qualitative design was thus in line with the ethnographic and interpretive anthropological peace-building commitments, as the study went beyond formal accounts of institutions to explore how peace is practiced, challenged, and maintained in daily life.

The research findings showed that the traditional leadership institutions still dominated local processes of peacebuilding in Rivers State. Respondents also indicated over and over again chiefs and elders, councils of chiefs, and heads of lineages as the first to respond to conflicts in the community and as the possessors of communal justice. These actors have not been viewed as representative, symbolic, and ceremonial, but as custodians of oral traditions, customary law interpreters, and enforcers of socially accepted practices. Their governing power was based on ancestral authority, collective social awareness, and close historical knowledge of local histories, borders, and social interactions. According to the respondents, traditional leaders are regularly involved in land disputes, inheritance issues, marital disputes, and daily interpersonal

quarrels, which are either used as an alternative or in addition to the state organs. Their ability to bring conflicting sides together, invite witnesses, and issue prescriptions that can appeal to the local moral norms was cited as one of the main factors in their success, supporting the claim that culturally recognized authority is essential to nonviolent conflict management and reconciliation (Lederach, 1997).

The analysis also determined that the reconciliation procedures involving traditional authorities are incorporated in the culturally significant procedures, emphasizing the recognition of wrongdoing, restitution, and the repair of social harmony. These often end in reconciliation rituals in the form of libations, shared meals, ritual gestures, or manifestations of forgiveness. The respondents observed these practices, which had profound moral and emotional implications, because they are not only a resolution to a conflict but also the reentry of the parties into the moral community. Old systems that were available, known, and seen as equitable were rampantly reported to be satisfactory. Unlike formal courts, which could be said to be distant, costly, time-consuming, and procedurally in touch with the realities of the community, indigenous mechanisms were considered intelligible and responsive. This conclusion confirms the argument, according to which legitimacy and proximity are enabling factors of compliance and reconciliation when the formal systems are seen as externally imposed or poorly sensitive to the local norms (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015).

Outside traditional leadership institutions, the research found that social structures at the grassroots were functionally complex in the course of peacebuilding. Age grade associations, youth groups, market women's association, and religious organizations were constantly cited to have played major mediating and preventative roles. The groups serve as mediators between the disputants and the traditional authorities, assist in de-escalating, mobilizing social pressure, and giving early warnings that the conflicts are escalating. The youth groups, especially, were termed as the possible origin of conflict as well as being essential instruments of peace, as they

can be mobilized to restrain when well engaged. The associations of market women were also observed to have an impact on the day-to-day economic life as well as their ability to impose social sanctions through collective action, whereas religious organizations were referred to as offering moral framing, counseling, and neutral grounds of conversation, particularly in the conflict that spanned across lineages or communities. The results correspond with anthropological thinking where the role of everyday social institutions in the maintenance of peace is beyond formal mediation (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001).

The study also ascertained that these grassroots organizations help in peacebuilding beyond formal mediation, but also by developing ordinary practices and norms that make coexistence a commonplace. Rituals, festivals, common labor, and performances in the community have often been mentioned as a means by which peace is created and reproduced socially. These practices strengthen collective identities, re-establish mutual commitments, and convert memories of conflict into shared accounts of reconciliation. The participants emphasized that peace is felt not only as lack of violence, but as a feeling of reestablished normality, confidence, and predictability in social relationships. This observation indicates the anthropological observation of the fact that enduring peace is maintained through continuous social mending and through the production of common meanings, and not by agreements per se (Schmidt and Schroder, 2001).

Concurrently, the study also found that there are major limitations that make the indigenous and hybrid peacebuilding in Rivers State challenging. The issue of political interference surfaced as one of the main issues, and respondents cited that traditional institutions are at times entangled in the battle of the parties or coerced by the political elite to align themselves with a particular side in a conflict. Elite capture and corruption were also ranked among some of the reasons that contribute to the loss of trust in customary mechanisms, especially when it is seen that the process of decision-making is not based on communal norms but on factors such as

wealth, political relations, or other interests. Such processes weaken moral authority, on which the efficacy of the conventional institutions is based, and can create resentment among the marginalized groups that mirrors critical scholarship warning about the need to romanticize the local (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015).

The other significant conclusion was to do with the low participation of women and youth in formal decision-making processes. Women and youth were reported to be most excluded in formal dispute resolution forums, though these groups were reported to be among the most adversely affected by conflict and some of the key contributors to regular community life. Respondents noted that such exclusion raises questions of fairness and diminishes the ability of peace agreements to respond to the harboring of grievances, especially gendered grievances and intergenerational conflicts. Although there are communities that have started to involve women's groups and youth representatives in the peace processes, they have been termed to be lopsided and largely relied on the will of individual leaders, but not through institutionalized norms.

Lastly, the study also revealed a long-standing tension between the informal and official state structures. Despite some reports of cooperation, such as referrals between traditional leaders and security agencies, participants reported that there is a lot of confusion over jurisdiction, particularly in complex or cross-community disputes. This confusion promotes forum shopping, whereby disputants will maneuver between customary and formal institutions to find favorable results. It also causes enforcement complications in which a decision to arrive at using the customary process fails to conform to statutory law or is not formally recognized. Such dynamics highlight the contingent quality of hybrid peace structures and underscore the need to establish more explicit frameworks defining roles, responsibilities, and coordination systems between customary and state-based systems and not depend on ad hoc coexistence (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015).

5.2 Conclusion

The results indicate that balancing between tradition, meaningful participation, and institutional reform is the key to sustainable peace in Rivers State. Peace cannot be gained through customary power or with the help of formal legal systems alone. It arises where the legitimacy of practices based on cultures, inclusive community formations, and responsive state institutions interact in a coherent way.

Sustainable peace can be achieved when the local perspectives are acknowledged and respected. There is a rich social authority among the communities held in indigenous institutions, including councils of elders, age-grade associations, women's groups, and reconciliation ceremonies. They enjoy respect since they are ingrained in common histories, values, and way of life. Such systems usually manage to regain relationships and develop trust at the local levels. Nevertheless, they are most successful when the efforts are institutionalized and supported by formal institutions that are supportive of the efforts through legal backing, organization, and broader recognition. Traditional mechanisms, unlike state mechanisms, may not adequately address culturally rooted structural drivers of conflict or cross-community relations. Similarly, intervention by the state when it does not consider the realities at the local level is likely to be perceived as forced and unacceptable.

The Rivers State experience lies in the experience of peacebuilding. Conflict is linked to social relations, the economy, the political marginalization, and environmental issues deeply embedded in the collective memory. Indigenous practices acknowledge these issues, and they focus on reconciliation, reintegration, and social repair, not punishment. The rituals, discussion groups, and communal meetings are useful in regaining dignity and a sense of belonging. Such procedures restore confidence in a manner that cannot be achieved in a pure legal decision. The results affirm that sustainability depends on relationships, culture, and identity, rather than only institutional processes.

Simultaneously, the research identifies significant flaws in indigenous systems. Perceived fairness and impartiality are key elements of their effectiveness. When custom institutions become politicized, are captured by elites, or are corrupted, they lose their legitimacy. Once this happens, societies will lose trust, and violence can reappear. There can be no trust in where decisions seem to be biased or manipulated. What is needed is integrity and not cultural resonance to achieve sustainable peace. Customary and formal institutions are, thus, supposed to work transparently and consistently.

Fragmentation between communities and the state may destroy trust in both institutions. Greater sustainability is realized in cases where hybrid arrangements are planned. These arrangements grant the state actors recognition of the authority of the local systems, and they assist them by giving them legal recognition and coordination systems. Institutional practices, in their turn, pursue formal structures in a manner that promotes accountability and coherence. Such collaboration is especially relevant in cases where the conflict is not confined to the family or the community but includes other parties, like companies or the government.

In addition to the above, the role of women and youth has been critical in ensuring social stability, but they tend to be left out of the formal decision-making arena. The study indicates that peace processes work better when these groups are involved. Their views provide diversity to deliberations and can curb tension in day-to-day situations that may otherwise take an unmanageable turn. Exclusion, on the other hand, dilutes ownership of agreements and could give rise to parallel grievances. The inclusion increases the legitimacy and the sustainability of the outcomes of peace. This result supports the need to institutionalize gender and generational representation as opposed to it being symbolic.

The study also reveals that most of the conflicts in Rivers State are structurally rooted in economic and political factors. Environmental erosion, unemployment, boundary disputes,

competition for arable land, and unequal allocation of resources are some of the issues that cause resentment. These drivers cannot be resolved only through mediation and reconciliation. Sustainable peace is reformed to accommodate material imbalances and governance shortfalls. The advancement of relational healing and structural justice should go hand in hand in case the cycles of conflict are interrupted.

Generally, the report indicates that sustainable peace in Rivers State needs to be synthesized and not replaced. It is not the answer to forget state institutions and romanticize tradition. It resides in reinforcing the relations between them. The native systems provide validity, cultural knowledge, and intimacy. Formal institutions offer scope, legal comprehension, and enforcement. These strengths complement each other when put together with a lot of thought.

Peacebuilding should thus be regarded as a process requiring constant communication, change, and revision. Institutions should be flexible to local contexts, and leaders should be open to reflection and reform. Communities should be given the power to play an active role in the process of governing themselves. Cooperation, trust, and accountability at the various levels develop into sustainable peace.

5.3 Recommendations

The research findings and conclusions form the basis of a series of recommendations for enhancing sustainable peacebuilding in Rivers State. These suggestions are based on findings emerging from the research that underscore the need to shift episodic conflict management to institutionalized, inclusive, and culturally legitimate peace architectures that could deal with relational as well as structural causes of conflict.

First, the federal, state, and local actors have a burning need to work together to create sustainable and institutionalized dialogue, reconciliation, trauma recovery, and socio-economic empowerment platforms. The study evidence shows that the conflicts in Rivers State are hardly

occasional; they are rather components of the historical grievance attached to environmental destruction, political marginalization, land conflict, youth unemployment, and the sense of injustice in the distribution of resources. It follows that peacebuilding should not be approached as a reactive response that is initiated once the violence has broken out. Rather, it must be enshrined in ongoing, systemic processes, which form foreseeable channels of communication, expression of grievances, and restoration of relationships. Such dialogue forums are to be based on traditional rulers, community elders, women leaders, youth representatives, religious actors, civil society organizations, and pertinent state officials to engage in frequent interactions aimed at avoiding escalation and instilling trust. By institutionalizing such platforms, peacebuilding will be incorporated into the governance system and will not be an emergency response mechanism. This will be in line with the principles of conflict transformation that focus on long-term relational contact and structural reform over short-term conflict settlement (Lederach, 1997).

For traditional and local peace-building efforts and institutions to be effective, they should be backed by formal mandates, operational frameworks, and sufficient resources. Institutionalized symbolic consultation is prone to strengthening cynicism and mistrust. There should be well-defined roles of dialogue bodies in early warning surveillance, coordination of mediation, and a referral channel between the customary and statutory institutions. These platforms should also be associated with public reporting structures in order to improve transparency and community trust. Communities will have greater chances to regard the peace processes as legitimate and available where the dialogue is ongoing and predictable. Additionally, formal cooperation between conventional organizations and state actors can lessen the ambiguity in jurisdictions that usually erode the hybrid ones, as it is emphasized in the local peace-building literature (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). Incorporating dialogue into governance systems makes the state less distant and externally imposed, too, increasing institutional legitimacy.

Peace platforms should also include organized trauma healing processes in addition to dialogue. The research also found out that conflicts cause emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds, which cannot be sufficiently resolved through legal settlements. The necessity to implement the communal healing practices that accompany the mediation processes was stressed by many of the participants. Thus, collaboration among the traditional leaders, religious groups, counselors who are trained, and the civil society organizations must be encouraged to provide culturally sensitive trauma support programmes. The healing programmes should recognize the experiences of victims in accordance with the intergenerational grievance and encourage the reintegration of former criminals where suitable. In the absence of trauma consideration, unresolved pain can recur and disrupt fragile agreements.

Peace efforts should also be coordinated with the socio-economic empowerment of youths. Unemployment and economic marginalization, especially among the youth, were discovered to trigger mobilization into violence repeatedly. A process of peace that does not consider the issue of material deprivation may turn out to be weak or unsustainable. The dialogue platforms must thus serve as a point of entry to organized economic projects which include vocational training, programmes of supporting entrepreneurship, environmental restoration projects, and community development programmes. Associating peacebuilding with economic opportunity goes not only to structural forces of conflict, but also to buttressing the real gains of stability. To achieve sustainable peace in Rivers State, relations should be repaired and transform socio-economic conditions, which have become the source of grievances.

There is also a need for legal and operational regularization of indigenous peace actors, like age-grade associations, women's unions, community mediation councils, and vigilante networks. The study reveals that these actors already play very important functions in early warning, mediation, social norm enforcement, and reconciliation. Nevertheless, they tend to be

engaged in informal or legally grey areas, which may create coordination problems and areas of accountability. This is due to the lack of clearly defined interfaces between the customary and statutory systems, leading to duplication of efforts, forum shopping, and sometimes conflicting authorities. To enforce coherence, the state and local authorities are recommended to officially embrace the peace-building roles of the indigenous bodies and maintain their cultural independence.

Regularisation does not connote bureaucratic absorption or loss of customary power. Instead, it involves role clarification, the setup of referral mechanisms, and jurisdictional limits by agreed bilateral frameworks. Memoranda of understanding between traditional institutions and statutory agencies that are publicly available can reduce mistrust and increasing coordination. Working principles formulated in consultation with local actors may support the assurance of the compliance of the mediation processes with the standard of basic human rights as well as cultural authenticity. These frameworks would enhance institutional interoperability without compromising local legitimacy, which is largely debated in hybrid peace-building scholarship (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015).

Formal recognition needs to be accompanied by capacity building. The indigenous actors are supposed to be trained in mediation techniques, documentation, gender sensitivity, conflict analysis, and coordination with the formal security institutions. This should be participatory training that should not be forced onto the people but should be based on local knowledge systems. The development of technical skills does not fall away from cultural authority; it empowers the community actors to operate in more complex conflict situations, which may be either intra-communal fights or external intervention when the actors are political or oil companies. Small logistics assistance, such as communication equipment and conference rooms, can also contribute to operational efficiency.

Regularisation should, however, be carried out with accountability measures. The study revealed issues of politicization, elite capture, and corruption by some of the traditional institutions. The legitimacy of maintenance and abuse of authority may be avoided by community oversight mechanisms and periodic review processes. Responsibility will build trust, and trust is the cornerstone on which the indigenous peace systems will be built. Compliance is improved, and the repetition of conflicts is reduced when people think that leaders are fair and open.

There is also a need for systematic incorporation of women and youth into the process of decision-making on peace and security. The research showed that there is an ongoing trend in which the roles of women and the youth in informal reconciliation, caregiving, and stabilization of the community are crucial, but they are underrepresented in formal peace forums. This marginalization undermines the appearance as well as the practical efficacy of peace arrangements. Transformation scholarship on conflict always focuses on the fact that exclusion will damage sustainability, and inclusion processes are stronger (Lederach, 1997). Inclusion should then be taken beyond the limits of the rhetorical commitments of the institutionalized mechanisms.

Operation structures should involve a structured representation of women and youth in dialogue platforms and mediation councils. The participation must be meaningful, but not tokenistic, whereby roles in the agenda setting, deliberation, and monitoring the implementation are clearly defined. The leadership development programmes focused on the women's organization and youth group can increase the level of negotiation, policy literacy, and confidence to participate effectively in the decision-making processes. Inclusion is not only an equity issue, but it is also a strategic requirement. Women and young people tend to have some distinct knowledge about household-level tensions, economic frailties, and new emerging

dangers that might not be apparent to conventional traditional male-dominated leadership frameworks.

Inclusion measures should be accompanied by periodic evaluations of the participation levels and the impact of involvement in decisions. Gender and youth participation are improved through reporting to the public, which is an indicator that institutions are committed to being equitable. Where funding mechanisms are conditional based on peace initiatives, they can be used to indicate that there has been observable progress in terms of inclusion, thus a guiding factor. Inclusion should be a design value that is incorporated into institutional frameworks and not one that is added.

The engagement of the youth should also be connected directly to economic empowerment. Absence of avenues of livelihood can leave the youth susceptible to political maneuvering or mobilization towards violence. Peace-building plans need to synchronize with the employment plans, entrepreneurship plans, and the education plans that provide alternative ways to social acknowledgment and financial stability. Empowerment will convert the youths who are viewed as threats to security into peace agents. Equally, gender sensitive models should respond to the unique malevolence that women face in conflict and acknowledge their contribution to communal strength.

The sixth recommendation is to take steps towards strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems in peace architectures. Peace that is sustainable needs constant observation of the progress, recognition of the emerging risks, and change of strategies. The autonomous monitoring committees with the civil society representatives, reputable community members, and academic institutions might trace the indicators like the recurrence of conflicts, the rates of agreement implementation, the indicators of inclusion, and the level of satisfaction among the communities. Clear reporting helps to increase the confidence of the population and

provides an opportunity to take the necessary corrective measures in the case of stagnation or the degradation of the peace processes. Monitoring must include quantitative measurements as well as qualitative measurements of the repair of the relationship and the restoration of trust, since peace is not just the lack of violence.

Lastly, peacebuilding should be associated with structural justice and fair governance. Poor environmental degradation, uneven allocation of resources, and political marginalization are the major sources of conflict in Rivers State. These underlying issues cannot be solved only through dialogue and mediation. There is a need to have coordinated activities between peace platforms and development agencies to take care of environmental remediation, equitable resource management, and disparities in infrastructure. Conflict transformation also notes that structural change should be one that comes with relational repair (Lederach, 2003). Reconciliation will otherwise only be a symbolic process unless structural grievances are addressed.

5.4 Contributions to Knowledge

The research has some substantive contributions to knowledge and, in addition, recognizes the limitations and specifies critical areas of research that can be undertaken in the future. Collectively, these factors place the study in the context of the wider academic discussions on peacebuilding, hybrid governance, and transformation of conflicts, as well as offering a space to further academic and policy development.

One of the main contributions to the research is the empirical richness and the context of the study. When applied to Rivers State, the resource-endowed and conflict-prone region of the Niger Delta, the study provides grounded and region-specific quantitative and qualitative data on the workings and success of anthropological peacebuilding. Although the main body of the current literature on local or hybrid peacebuilding is based on normative advocacy or general comparative assertions, this research paper provides specific field-based knowledge of how

traditional leadership institutions, cultural rituals, and communitarian social structures work in practice. It does not just give the narrative of cases but gives an analytical insight into how legitimacy is built, how obedience is brought, and how reconciliation is maintained in systems that are culturally embedded. By so doing, it has the potential to fill a gap between the theoretical debate on conflict transformation and the realities of community life in the face of layered conflicts that are instigated by resource extraction, environmental degradation, and political marginalization.

The study also adds to conflict transformation literature because it shows that cultural practices and social structures are not just symbolic manifestations of reconciliation, but they are also functional conflict management units. Rituals, communal meetings, age group associations, women's networks, and youth groups have also been demonstrated to have preventive, mediating, and enforcement functions that can go beyond formal negotiations. The studies prove theoretical assertions that relational repair and social capital are the keys to sustainable peace by empirically recording the ways in which such structures produce social pressure, collective memory, and reintegration. It offers proof that community-based institutions can be utilized as early warning systems and resilience infrastructures, and thus the analytical scope of the conflict transformation theory can be applied to actual local practice.

The other important contribution is the question of inclusion. The study provides empirical evidence on the paradoxical place of women and the youth in the peace processes. These groups are already very active in informal reconciliation and community stabilization, but they are still underrepresented in the formal decision-making forums. The research points out the importance of this gap by reporting the discrepancy between the idea of participatory rhetoric and institutional reality. This observation has a theoretical and policy implication. Conceptually, it supports the idea that exclusion compromises the legitimacy as well as the sustainability of the peace processes. In practise, it offers an evidence-based rationale for

institutional reforms that entrench gender and youth inclusion as structural design principles and not as an optional consideration.

Another policy-relevant knowledge that the study provides is the translation of the empirical results into recommendations that can be implemented. It shows that state-led interventions on top, that is, when they are not connected to the culturally acceptable local systems, find it difficult to produce sustainable results. But it also cautions against blind romanticization of indigenous systems, especially when they are politicized, as well as when they are captured by elites or do not incorporate gender. Through promoting institutionalized dialogue space, routinization of indigenous actors, institutionalized forms of inclusion, and accountability structures, the study offers a balanced roadmap to the context-sensitive peacemaking design. Such a combination of empirical data and normative advice makes the study more useful to policymakers, actors in the civil society, and development practitioners.

In spite of these contributions, the study has some limitations that are worth stating. The first of these is associated with the study's geographical coverage. The study is limited to Rivers State, and though the results are not devoid of significance, they might not be entirely applicable to other states in the Niger Delta or other areas in Nigeria that are affected by the conflict. There are many local cultural processes, ethnic structures, and political situations that differ across the regions, and care should therefore be taken when generalizing the findings outside the study area.

The second weakness is related to methodology. Though the research is qualitatively deep, interview and self-report data can be affected by recall bias, social desirability bias, or strategic self-presentation of respondents. Although triangulation of secondary sources minimized these risks, there is the limitation of the subjectivity of the self-reported experiences.

A third constraint borders on time. The study is limited to the dynamics of peacebuilding over a specific period of time and fails to follow up on the results of these agreements over the long term and across several cycles of conflicts. An alternative way to measure sustainable peace would be over the long run. Such a longitudinal approach can offer more understanding of whether hybrid mechanisms are stable enough to prevent recurrence or delay escalation.

These constraints inform possible pathways for future research. First, a comparative analysis of various states in the Niger Delta can be done to find out whether the trends observed in Rivers State apply to other states. This kind of comparative analysis would assist in determining which design principles could be transferred and which practices are context specific.

Second, future studies could examine the economic aspects and determinants of peace-building more thoroughly, especially the connection between the youth employment programme and the rate of conflict reoccurrence. The incorporation of political economy analysis could facilitate the knowledge of the intersection of structural reforms and relational transformation.

Third, there is a need to conduct additional research on gendered aspects of peacebuilding. Although this study has determined marginalization trends, a more intensive study may be conducted on how informal mediation networks by women function, how gender norms build power, and how institutional changes modify participation relationships with time.

Fourth, future research can address digital transformation, the impact of technology on hybrid peace arrangements, and the ways communication platforms might be used to affect early warning mechanisms or alter the balance of power.

Lastly, longitudinal research could assess the sustainability of the hybrid peace platforms after they are institutionalized. A longitudinal study of implementation patterns, funding sustainability, and community perceptions would go a long way in supporting the development of evidence-based policies.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Introduction: The interview seeks to understand how traditional leadership institutions, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, cultural practices, and social structures influence peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in Rivers State. It also explores their relationship with formal state-led peace-building approaches.

Section A: Demographic Profile

1. Can you please tell me your age group?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your highest educational level attained?
4. What is your occupation or role in the community?
5. Which ethnic group do you identify with?
6. How long have you lived in Rivers State?
7. What position or status do you hold in your community? (*e.g., Elder, youth, community leader, etc.*)

Section B: Effectiveness of Traditional and Indigenous Peace-building Mechanisms

8. How familiar are you with the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms practiced in your community?
 - Can you describe some of these mechanisms?
9. Have you personally participated in any traditional conflict resolution process?
 - Can you share your experience?
10. In your opinion, how effective are traditional leaders such as chiefs or elders in mediating disputes?
 - What makes them effective or ineffective?
11. What types of conflicts are most commonly resolved through indigenous mechanisms in your community?
 - Are there certain conflicts that are difficult to resolve traditionally?
12. How do community members generally react to the outcomes of traditional mediation processes?
 - Are these decisions usually respected and followed?

13. Are these traditional mechanisms linked to or integrated with formal state institutions, such as courts or government peace committees?
- Can you give examples of collaboration or tension between traditional and state systems?
14. What do you see as the main strengths of traditional dispute resolution methods in your community?
- Why do you consider these as strengths?
 - What are their main weaknesses or limitations?

Section C: Cultural Practices and Social Structures

15. Are there specific cultural practices, festivals, or rituals in your community that are aimed at reconciliation or restoring harmony?
- Can you describe how these practices work and their significance?
16. In peace-building processes within your community, how often are youth, women, or marginalized groups included?
- Why do you think they are included or excluded?
17. Do you believe that social structures such as age-grade groups, associations, or community-based organizations help to build lasting peace?
- Can you provide examples of how these groups function?
18. In your experience, do cultural factors such as traditions, values, or beliefs affect whether peace agreements are accepted and sustained?
- Can you share a situation where cultural factors played a key role in the success or failure of peace-building efforts?
19. From your community's experiences, what lessons can be drawn that could help in resolving conflicts in other parts of Nigeria?
- What advice would you give to policymakers or peacebuilders?

Closing Questions

20. Looking ahead, what do you think should be done to strengthen peace-building efforts in Rivers State?
21. Do you have any final thoughts or recommendations you would like to share on how peace can be better achieved and sustained in your community?

Thank you for participating.