



Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research



Journal homepage: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJOMR/>

Communication Strategies for Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the peacebuilding communication strategies to understand their effectiveness and determine the extent to which they have advanced peace and stability in the state. We utilized a questionnaire as the research instrument to gather data from 578 respondents in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Taraba State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that while the government employs various peacebuilding communication strategies, including peace dialogue meetings and commissions of inquiry, there is a significant gap in the government's engagement with local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding, which may undermine the effectiveness of these efforts. However, respondents generally perceive the communication strategies for conflict resolution as effective. The government needs to prioritize inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding by engaging local communities in dialogue and involving them in the decision-making process. The government should prioritize inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding, local communities should take an active role in peacebuilding efforts, and media practitioners should adopt peace journalism principles in their reporting.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 19 Feb 2025

First Revised 23 Mar 2025

Accepted 21 May 2025

First Available online 22 May 2025

Publication Date 01 Sep 2025

Keyword:

Communication strategies,
Conflict resolution,
Peace journalism theory,
Peacebuilding,
Taraba state government.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has faced persistent conflicts throughout its history. These conflicts often manifest as ethno-religious tensions, political strife, and socio-economic disputes. The International Institute for Strategic Studies reported that the spectre of violence in sub-Saharan Africa remained prevalent into 2021 and early 2022. The region is home to some of the world's most troubled countries, including South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with Nigeria also ranked among the most affected by terrorism.

In Nigeria, various regions experience distinct forms of conflict. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North and the ongoing militancy and agitations for self-determination in the South illustrate the country's fractured landscape. Nigeria is deeply divided, with political discourse often shaped by complex religious and ethnic fault lines, making conflict and ethnic tension critical issues. Contributing factors include the dominance of majority groups over minorities, competition for resources, and pervasive mistrust. Some researchers highlight the alarming rise in diverse security challenges, from radical insurgencies to kidnapping, which have turned violence and crime into a national epidemic. The high rate of insecurity undermines societal structures, with each violent incident eroding trust in Nigeria's security apparatus.

The situation in North-East Nigeria has been particularly dire. In June 2022, the United Nations raised alarms about the plight of millions of women and children suffering due to armed conflicts, with over eight million people requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of the 12-year extremist insurgency. The violence has disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, subjecting them to exploitation, including child abuse and human trafficking. Reports indicate that women displaced by conflict often face further abuse within refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where they should be safe.

The ongoing conflict has resulted in significant loss of life and displacement. Since 2009, approximately 20,000 lives have been lost in the North-East due to Boko Haram attacks, displacing over two million people (Yacob-Haliso, 2021). Despite the passage of time, peace remains elusive, with continuous violence affecting both the North-East and Nigeria as a whole (Ja'afaru, 2021). Regions once vibrant with economic activity, such as the Baga fish market in Borno state, have experienced severe declines, with businesses shuttered and economic activities severely hampered.

Taraba State, created in 1991, has not been exempt from these conflicts. The state has experienced recurring violence, including ethno-religious clashes, farmers-herders disputes, and banditry. Conflicts are particularly prevalent in local government areas such as Jalingo, Wukari, and Takum, leading to loss of life and displacement, and significantly disrupting livelihoods (Deji & Shumo, 2021). The presence of approximately 80 ethnic groups, divided predominantly along religious lines of Islam and Christianity, exacerbates tensions, transforming ethnic disputes into broader religious conflicts (Deji & Shumo, 2021).

The necessity for effective peacebuilding strategies in Taraba State is paramount. Peacebuilding entails fostering reconciliation and dialogue among conflicting parties to establish lasting tranquillity. It addresses the root causes of conflict and promotes a holistic approach for sustainable peace. Effective peacebuilding goes beyond merely preventing violence; it seeks to transform how disputes are resolved, recognising conflict as an inherent aspect of human existence and advocating for a culture of peace that prioritises unity and harmony.

The media plays a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts. It acts as a watchdog and an agenda-setter, capable of identifying potential conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence through its reporting (Nwokolo, 2020; Inobemhe *et al.*, 2024). Peacebuilding communication strategies are essential in fostering unity and stability within society. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding the specific peacebuilding strategies employed by the Taraba State government and their effectiveness. This study explored these communication strategies and assessed their impact on peacebuilding efforts in North-East Nigeria.

The persistence of conflicts and violence in Taraba State, North-East Nigeria, despite various peacebuilding efforts by the government, underscores the need for improved communication strategies to achieve lasting peace. Current research on peacebuilding in Nigeria emphasises strategic administration and policy formation but lacks an in-depth focus on the communication strategies employed by state governments to foster trust, encourage participation, and promote reconciliation among citizens. The challenge is that without effective communication, peacebuilding strategies may not reach or resonate with the people they are meant to serve, risking the sustainability of peace efforts in Nigerian states. Specifically, existing studies have not adequately explored how state governments, including Taraba State, communicate their peacebuilding strategies to citizens, highlighting a significant gap in understanding the role of communication in peacebuilding initiatives. This gap is critical because effective communication is essential for conflict prevention and resolution, and its absence can lead to short-term solutions that lack long-term impact, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and instability. Therefore, this study assessed the peacebuilding communication strategies employed by the Taraba State government in North-East Nigeria, with a focus on understanding their effectiveness and determining the extent to which they have advanced peace and stability in the state.

The objectives of the study were to:

- (i) Find out the extent to which the Taraba State government adopts communication strategies for peacebuilding.
- (ii) Identify the various peacebuilding communication strategies of the Taraba State government.
- (iii) Ascertain the level of effectiveness of the communication strategies used for peacebuilding in Taraba State.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1. Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding refers to the progression from conflict to a non-conflict situation where individuals pursue their aspirations without fear. Peacebuilding is the act of supporting individuals who are distressed by or at risk of conflict to avert or put an end to harmful confrontations. It involves building an environment suitable for lasting peace and social development by tackling the main causes of conflicts, such as discrimination, injustice, or motivated conflicts, which can prolong violence cycles and impede harmonious relations.

UNICEF sees peacebuilding as the process of managing disputes to establish a peaceful outcome by empowering people to tackle conflicts constructively to create a culture of tolerance among themselves. This implies that any attempt at resolving disputes among conflicting groups should be beneficial to all. Peacebuilding is a holistic and continuous process that intends to promote conflict resolution, understanding, empathy, and unity by empowering individuals and supporting development and economic revitalisation.

On the other hand, some researchers describe peacebuilding as the process of establishing useful relations among diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, class, or national groups with the

primary goal of settling issues of social inequalities in a nonaggressive manner and to change the circumstances that create lethal hostilities. Peacebuilding is a comprehensive approach that looks at issues of human rights, violence, economic development, and environmental sustainability. It involves conflict prevention, mitigation, interaction, transformation, and resolution, and is a total shift from a conflict situation to a nonviolent state. Effective peacebuilding tactics entail a logical approach that aligns with the needs of those affected by conflicts, and it is specific and not generalised.

2.2. Communication Strategies

Communication can be described as a process of passing information, ideas, thoughts, notions, or beliefs between two or more people through established language, codes, symbols, signs, or gestures. Exchanging ideas, emotions, and messages requires a shared system of communication, encompassing language, signs, or codes. For communication to be effective, the encoder and the decoder must have the same understanding of the mode of communication being used. Some researchers describe communication as a means through which individuals jointly create understanding, reflecting what is happening in society, and establishing a common ground between individuals.

Communication can take verbal or nonverbal form, and meaning can be exchanged through facial expressions, signs, symbols, codes, tone of voice, or through intrapersonal, interpersonal, public, group, or mass communication (Inobemhe et al., 2024). Some researchers note that communication encompasses more than just verbal and written language; it also includes nonverbal cues, personal traits, and styles that convey meaning. This implies that communication can effectively take place without a word being uttered, and body language, facial expression, or a simple silence can convey a message.

Communication strategies refer to roadmaps that are purposely designed by individuals to efficiently communicate messages to the intended audience. A communication strategy is a blueprint that is designed to convey messages to established audiences, stating three vital aspects that have an absolute effect on the communication outcome: the message, the means of conveying it, and the identified target audiences. Effective communication strategies serve as the foundation for effective communication, guiding the communication process to ensure messages are conveyed clearly, efficiently, and effectively to achieve goals and establish relationships. A communication strategy should clearly state the communication objectives, the means of communicating the message, the stakeholders involved, main message, and the procedure of receiving feedback, and can be formal or informal, but its purpose is to ensure that messages are received as intended and the desired effects are achieved.

2.3. Pivotal Role of Peacebuilding Communication in Contemporary Society

Peacebuilding communication is a vital tool for fostering empathy, understanding, and resolution in societies ravaged by conflicts (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). Successful peacebuilding communication encompasses negotiation, peaceful interaction, and adequate understanding to tackle the underlying factors driving conflict and advance peaceful resolution (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Galtung's peacebuilding framework stresses the need for communication strategies that go beyond settling disputes and changing the root causes of conflicts, emphasising participatory communication, promoting understanding, and constructive conflict management.

Communication plays a pivotal role in shaping our identity, sense of self, and relationships (Inobemhe et. al., 2024). It is the catalyst for peacebuilding, fostering unity, clarifying misinterpretations, and settling disputes (Guzuma & Odogbo, 2023; Ja'afaru & Inobemhe,

2024). Effective communication creates a resolution-focused atmosphere, promoting understanding and kindness (Guzuma & Odogbo, 2023). Communication helps us navigate complex social dynamics, including gender roles and expectations.

Peacebuilding communication is characterised by dialogue, inclusivity, non-violence, empathy, change, and sustainability. It employs diverse communication means, ranging from interpersonal, group to mass communication, to disseminate messages that mitigate conflicts, promote understanding, and encourage negotiation. Effective peacebuilding communication requires adequate knowledge of the conflict, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability. By understanding the complexities of conflict and the needs of diverse stakeholders, peacebuilding communication can play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable peace and social change (Eze *et al.*, 2021). A communication strategy outlines the methods that would be employed to communicate with members of the audience through engagement campaigns, highlighting the importance of a well-planned approach to peacebuilding communication.

2.4. Peacebuilding Communication Strategies

Peacebuilding communication strategies entail the purposeful use of communication to advance peaceful initiatives, tolerance, and resolution in conflict-ridden areas or societies. Scholars aver that genuine peace is deliberately built over time with diverse methods and strategies that prompt conflict actors to support peaceful initiatives and achieve sustainable peace (Ndeche & Iroye, 2022). One effective approach is discourse and concession, which involves engaging conflict parties in dialogue to identify the root causes of conflicts, negotiate, and work towards peace. This approach has proven to be an efficient means of resolving disputes among conflicting groups over time. Communication plays a pivotal role in shaping our identity and sense of self, and discourse and concession can be an effective means of resolving disputes.

Community engagement is another crucial strategy, which is a grassroots approach to peacebuilding communication where community members actively participate in a peace process. By leveraging the experience and knowledge of communities, relationships can be transformed, and peace can be built and sustained. This approach helps resolve conflicts and build peace, particularly when community leaders, village heads, district heads, youth groups, women groups, and traditional councils form the body of stakeholders to participate in communication for peace.

Media and communication are also vital tools in peacebuilding, shaping narratives, influencing public views, and promoting harmony in society. Peace journalism and development communication can be used to improve the living conditions of people and foster peace by disseminating information that represents diverse views. Through conflict-sensitive reporting and media literacy, the media can monitor and report stories that are not biased, and the people can learn through the media's educative programs.

Finally, education and training are important factors of peacebuilding communication strategies, strengthening people, societies, and groups to manage conflict in a manner that fosters unity and harmony. By developing conflict resolution skills and promoting peaceful living and societies that respect and include all voices in decision-making, education and training can play a critical role in promoting sustainable peace. Some researchers emphasize the importance of communication in promoting understanding and tolerance, highlighting the significance of education and training in peacebuilding efforts.

2.5. Empirical Review

Previously published works on topics related to peacebuilding strategies abound. Some researchers reported Umuada in the sociopolitical institution for peacebuilding and conflict management in Nigeria, examining the role of Umuada, a group in the South East region of Nigeria, in local peacebuilding efforts in specific areas of Enugu State. The researcher relied on observations, interviews, and dialogues with key informants in the state and found that Umuada, comprising the first daughters of each family in the region, have used their forum and platform to voice their desires, needs, and concerns on matters affecting them and the larger community. The study revealed that Umuada act as arbitrators and a force for de-escalation, playing significant cultural roles that men cannot perform. This study relates to the current research in its focus on peacebuilding efforts by institutions, but differs in its specific context and methodology, as it explores the role of Umuada in Enugu State, whereas the current study examines the peacebuilding strategies adopted by the government of Taraba State.

Also, other researchers research on traditional institutions and peacebuilding in the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba State in Nigeria, assessing the peacebuilding process in the conflict, focusing on the level of involvement of traditional institutions. The researcher adopted both quantitative and qualitative surveys and focus group discussions to gauge the perceptions of respondents. The findings revealed that traditional institutions play a significant role in peacebuilding, including providing effective leadership and communication. This study shares similarities with the current research in its focus on Taraba State and peacebuilding efforts, but differs in its specific focus on traditional institutions, whereas the current study examines the peacebuilding strategies adopted by the state government. Additionally, the current study uses a mixed research method with in-depth interviews, whereas the study under review used focus group discussions.

Furthermore, some researchers (Igbashangev & Ogunyemi, 2022) reported the evaluation of the role of communication as a management tool for crisis resolution between Tiv-Jukun crises in Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria, ascertaining the remote and root causes of the conflict and pinpointed the drivers and triggers of the perennial conflict between the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups. They adopted interview methods to elicit data based on the opinions of various demographics in the two ethnic nationalities. The findings demonstrated that the desire for political positions and competition over land resources are significant drivers and triggers of the conflict. This study relates to the current research in its focus on Taraba State and the Tiv-Jukun conflict, but differs in its specific focus on communication as a management tool for crisis resolution, whereas the current study examines the peacebuilding strategies adopted by the state government. The current study also used a survey, whereas the study under review used only interviews.

2.6. Peace Journalism Theory

The Peace Journalism Theory was propounded by Johan Galtung in 1985 as an innovative approach to news reporting that emphasises nonviolent communication, constructive conflict coverage, and peacebuilding. This theory posits that journalism can shape public opinion and influence policy by focusing on peace efforts, conflict resolution, and highlighting nonviolent alternatives. At its core, peace journalism recognises that media contents decisively shape public opinion and, to a large extent, influences policy formation (Muhammad Auwal & Ersoy, 2024).

The tenets of Peace Journalism Theory include emphasising peace initiatives, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, capturing diverse views in reportage, people-oriented and solution-focused reporting, and prioritising peace and knowledgeable public interaction

(Musa & Antwi-Boateng, 2023). Peace journalism promotes a bottom-up strategy, focusing on victims of conflicts and potential actors in conflict resolution processes (Okocha & Terhile, 2022). It also entails editors and reporters cautiously selecting news sources, framing reports, and prudently using appropriate words to improve the opportunities for peace by creating an atmosphere where peace actors and peace initiatives can thrive without altering journalistic ethics (Musa & Antwi-Boateng, 2023).

The application of Peace Journalism Theory to this study on peacebuilding communication strategies of Taraba State Government in North East Nigeria is significant. By adopting the principles of peace journalism, the media can support peace initiatives and reconciliation of conflicts in Taraba State. This theory provides a foundation for assessing the peacebuilding communication strategies of the Taraba State government and understanding how the media can shape public opinion and promote peaceful narratives in the state. In Taraba State, where conflict is a frequent occurrence, peace journalism can facilitate conflict resolution and create a substantial understanding among the various ethno-religious and social institutions in the state.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design, utilising a questionnaire as the research instrument to gather data from respondents in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Taraba State, Nigeria. The LGAs selected were Jalingo, Sardauna, and Wukari, each representing one of the three senatorial zones of the state, with total populations of 220,700, 352,900, and 374,800, respectively, according to the National Population Commission (NPC) figures, resulting in a total population of 948,400. To determine the sample size, the Australian Calculator, an official statistical determination tool of the National Statistical Services, was used due to its ease of access and use. With a confidence level of 95%, a proportion of 0.5, and a confidence interval of 0.04, the calculator yielded a sample size of 600.

A random sampling technique was adopted. Random sampling ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Data collection was done on a face-to-face basis to ensure a high response rate and to clarify any questions respondents may have had. Out of the 600 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 578 were retrieved, representing a response rate of 96.3%, while the remaining 22 copies were lost. The retrieved questionnaires were analysed using simple percentages and tables to present the findings clearly and concisely. The choice of survey design and random sampling technique was justified by the need to generalise the findings to the larger population, while the use of the Australian Calculator ensured that the sample size was statistically significant and representative of the population.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that the majority of respondents (282; 48.8%) reported that the government engages local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding "Less Often", while 98 respondents (17.0%) reported that the government "Never" engages local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding. This means that there is a significant gap in the government's engagement with local communities in peacebuilding efforts, suggesting that the government's approach to peacebuilding may not be inclusive or participatory, and that local communities may not be adequately involved in the peacebuilding process.

Table 1. Frequency of the government engaging local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding.

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Often	11	1.9	1.9	1.9
Often	132	22.8	22.8	24.7
Can't Tell	55	9.5	9.5	34.3
Less Often	282	48.8	48.8	83.0
Never	98	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	578	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 illustrates the various peacebuilding communication strategies employed by the government, highlighting the importance of peace dialogue meetings and commissions of inquiry. This indicates that the government prioritises inclusive processes that involve multiple stakeholders in peacebuilding efforts. Through actively seeking dialogue and consultation, the government demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive conflict resolution, which can lead to more harmonious community relationships.

Table 2. Responses on different forms of peacebuilding communication strategies adopted by the government.

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Peacebuilding consultants	100	17.3	17.3	17.3
Commission of inquiry	193	33.4	33.4	50.7
Ceasefire agreement	12	2.1	2.1	52.8
Peace dialogue meeting	212	36.7	36.7	89.4
Meditation workshops	43	7.4	7.4	96.9
Peace and conflict resolution	18	3.1	3.1	100.0
Total	578	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 indicates that respondents generally perceive the communication strategies for conflict resolution as effective. This suggests a strong confidence in the government's ability to address conflicts through its communication efforts. Such positive perceptions can cultivate greater public support for ongoing and future initiatives, encouraging a culture of dialogue and cooperation within the community.

The findings of this study on the Taraba State Government's peacebuilding efforts in North-East Nigeria reveal a significant gap in the government's engagement with local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding. According to **Table 1**, the majority of respondents (282, 48.8%) reported that the government engages local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding "Less Often", while 98 respondents (17.0%) reported that the government "Never" engages local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding. This suggests that the government's approach to peacebuilding may not be inclusive or participatory, and that local communities may not be adequately involved in the peacebuilding process. This finding is consistent with previous research, which highlights the importance of community engagement and participation in peacebuilding efforts.

However, the study also found that the government employs various peacebuilding communication strategies, including peace dialogue meetings and commissions of inquiry (**Table 2**). These strategies indicate that the government prioritises inclusive processes that involve multiple stakeholders in peacebuilding efforts. This finding is in line with the principles of peace journalism theory, which emphasises the importance of capturing diverse views in reportage and promoting people-oriented and solution-focused reporting (Musa & Antwi-

Boateng, 2023). By actively seeking dialogue and consultation, the government demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive conflict resolution, which can lead to more harmonious community relationships.

Furthermore, the study found that respondents generally perceive the communication strategies for conflict resolution as effective (**Table 3**). This suggests a strong confidence in the government's ability to address conflicts through its communication efforts. Peace journalism theory recognises that media contents decisively shape public opinion and, to a large extent, influences policy formation (Muhammad Auwal & Ersoy, 2024). Therefore, the government's peacebuilding communication strategies can play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and promoting peaceful narratives in the state.

Table 3. Level of effectiveness of communication strategies for conflict resolution.

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less Effective	93	16.1	16.1	16.1
Can't Tell	37	6.4	6.4	22.5
Effective	360	62.3	62.3	84.8
Very Effective	88	15.2	15.2	100.0
Total	578	100.0	100.0	

5. CONCLUSION

While the Taraba State Government employs various peacebuilding communication strategies, including peace dialogue meetings and commissions of inquiry, there is a significant gap in the government's engagement with local communities in dialogue for peacebuilding, which may undermine the effectiveness of these efforts. However, the study also found that respondents generally perceive the communication strategies for conflict resolution as effective, suggesting a strong confidence in the government's ability to address conflicts through its communication efforts. It is therefore recommended that:

- (i) The Taraba State government should prioritise inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding by engaging local communities in dialogue and involving them in the decision-making process. This can be achieved through regular town hall meetings, community outreach programs, and other forms of public engagement.
- (ii) Local communities should take an active role in peacebuilding efforts by participating in peace dialogue meetings and other initiatives aimed at promoting peace and conflict resolution. They should also hold leaders accountable for their actions and advocate for inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding.
- (iii) Media practitioners should adopt peace journalism principles in their reporting, prioritising people-oriented and solution-focused reporting that captures diverse views and promotes peace and conflict resolution.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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