

Assessment of International NGOs' Roles and Challenges in Peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria

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Abstract: *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been one of the non-state actors that have contributed to world peace and peaceful coexistence; NGOs have served as a platform for individuals and organizations to contribute to peacebuilding and resolve various humanitarian crises. Every part of the world has its peculiarities; hence, it becomes imperative for international NGOs to face various challenges while discharging their duties. This paper focuses on identifying the roles and impediments of international NGOs in peacebuilding in the northeastern region of Nigeria. This paper adopted a qualitative research method, and the qualitative data was collected through journals, research publications, websites, and textbooks. The data collected reveals that illiteracy, insecurity, customs, and traditional beliefs, among other factors, are impediments that hinder the operations of international NGOs in the Northeast Region of Nigeria. This paper also identifies the roles of international NGOs in peacebuilding; education and research, provision of relief materials, provision of health care, and provision of social amenities are some of the roles of international NGOs identified in this paper. This paper suggested that the government should invest more in the education sector or adopt the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) education funding policy, and NGOs should partner with traditional rulers, as they are the custodians of traditions and customs, to ensure proper implementation of their policies and execution of their programs.*

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organization; Peacebuilding; Conflicts; Northeast Nigeria

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Introduction

The Northeast Region of Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria and comprises six states: Borno, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. The region, especially Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, was hit by various terrorist attacks. The terrorist attacks have led to the death of about 350,000, and it was projected that by 2030, 1.1 million people might die if the conflict persists (UNDP, 2021). The Northeast Region is also embattled with banditry attacks such as destruction of lives and properties, kidnapping, and cattle rustling, among other vices, and this has put the region in a situation that needs urgent positive intervention to return the once peaceful region to the path of peace and development.

These conflicts have led to the destruction of social amenities such as schools, hospitals, roads, and recreational centers, which have grossly affected socioeconomic development and plunged the region into a humanitarian crisis that does not only need the efforts of the government to solve but requires International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to help ensure that the humanitarian crisis in the region is resolved amid the conflicts and the region is being returned to the path of peace and development.

Various International NGOs have been operating in the Northeast since the start of the conflict. However, some NGOs face various impediments that need to be improved to bring about peace in the Northeast region. Hence, this study seeks to identify the roles of international NGOs in peacebuilding and highlights the impediments hindering their performance in the Northeast region of Nigeria.

This study adopted the John Galtung Peacebuilding Theory. John Galtung contributed to the development of

the peacebuilding theory, and he is also regarded as the father of peace studies due to his numerous works and the contribution to peace through mediation, publication of articles, writing of various textbooks, and contribution to book chapters, among other notable contributions (Ercoskun, 2021).

In his published article titled 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,' Galtung said there is a thin line between peace and violence. He further describes violence as the effects applied to people to cause them to fall short of their physical and mental potential (Galtung, 1969). He also provides a broad framework that ranges from ideological pressures to threats and from economic inadequacies to wars. The ideological pressures of religion and culture are some factors that propel threat in the Northeastern region of Nigeria, which has led to some violence in the region. The other framework that John Galtung highlighted is that economic inadequacies such as unemployment, illiteracy, and bad governance are some of the inadequacies that have enhanced insecurities in the region as the non-state actors have taken advantage of the economic inadequacies to recruit more vulnerable citizens to their sects.

Galtung (1990) explained violence concisely using the Violent Triangle Model, designed in his published article titled 'Cultural Violence.' The Violent Triangle Model gave three facets to violence, which are direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. The model further explains the underlying factors that propel violence in the Northeast region of Nigeria. The livelihood of the people, such as farming and herding, has caused violence in the region and the confrontation as a result of contradicting interests among various ethnic groups and religious groups in the region.

According to Ercoskun (2021), understanding violence becomes a prerequisite for achieving peace because Galtung's views on violence serve as the foundation for his views on peace. Galtung sees peace from two perspectives: negative peace and positive peace. Galtung (1964) defined negative peace as the absence of human violence, war, pessimism, curative, and peace that is not always achieved peacefully. In contrast, positive peace is the absence of structural violence, prevention, optimism, and peace through peaceful means (Grewal, 2003). To ensure peace is optimally restored, the government and relevant stakeholders like international organizations, NGOs, private citizens, international communities, and multinational organizations must restore positive rather than negative peace to society.

To ensure the restoration and presence of positive peace in society, the Global Peace Index, which defines peace as

the "absence of violence or the fear of violence," was used to determine which datasets had the strongest correlation with internal peacefulness. As a result of the datasets, eight (8) Pillars of Positive Peace were created (Global Peace Index, 2022). Well-functioning government, sound business environment, equitable resource distribution, respect for others' rights, good neighbor relations, free information flow, high levels of human capital, and low levels of corruption are the eight pillars of positive peace highlighted by the Global Peace Index.

NGOs are an aspect of civil society that lacks government representation and engages in conflict reduction, welfare schemes, empowerment, and employment. They can be crucial in achieving positive societal peace (Chris et al., 2021). This paper will discuss the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the challenges NGOs face, bearing in mind the focus of this research.

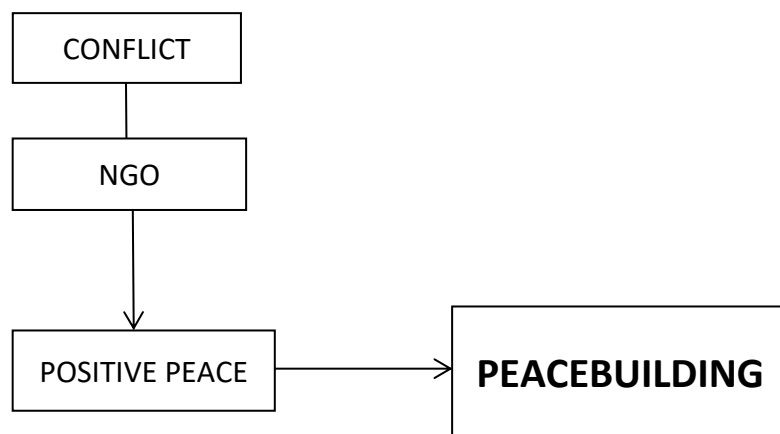


Figure 1. Conceptual framework
(Author, 2025)

The conceptual framework seeks to reveal the role played by NGOs in resolving conflicts and setting the affected society back on the path of peace. Conflict is a universal experience; as a result, humans

are obligated to participate in various conflict configurations and coalitions, each with its dynamic and logic (Dennen, 2005). Considering Nigeria's multi-dynamic nature and differences in religion,

ethnicity, political views, and other factors that constitute the society, conflicts in a society like Nigeria are inevitable.

One of the major conflicts that occur in the Northeast region of Nigeria is majorly caused by the insurgency of Boko Haram, a terrorist organization that has attacked local communities throughout Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, and is primarily to blame for the crisis in Northeastern Nigeria (UNHCHR, 2015).

NGOs have a significant role in mediating peace between communities polarized by conflict. At the local level, voluntary organizations have brought former adversaries together to collaborate on projects, which has promoted communication and helped settle disputes (Egeland, 1999). Since the start of the conflicts in the Northeastern region of Nigeria, various NGOs around the globe have come in to help with various aspects of peacebuilding.

Positive rather than negative peace should be prioritized to ensure sustainable peace in the Northeast. Positive peace offers a framework for comprehending and resolving the world's many intricate problems (Dlewis, 2023). Positive peace opposes what is known as the "structures and cultures of violence," which can lead people to act violently or impose violence on others. Positive peace is considered a more permanent form based on sustained investments in institutions, economic development, and societal attitudes that promote peace (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018).

To address the deep-rooted causes of conflicts and restore peace in the Northeast region of Nigeria, the government alone cannot achieve the enormous task involved. Hence, the role of NGOs in the conflict is fated. The NGOs have to embark on various roles geared towards resolving the conflict and

bringing about peacebuilding in the conflict-ravaged region of Northeast Nigeria. The roles of NGOs towards peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria and the impediments faced by the NGOs will be discussed in this study.

Method

This study adopts qualitative methods using secondary data as its primary source of data collection. Qualitative research remains optimal for understanding complex social situations, including peacebuilding, because it allows researchers to study stakeholder perspectives and roles along with their difficulties, especially in the case of international NGOs.

Data for this study came from a wide range of diverse secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, government publications, newspapers, relevant textbooks, organizational websites, and NGO official reports. The study also considers the uses of secondary data from various sources to examine extensive documented information about the region because of restricted access and safety concerns.

The researcher applied thematic analysis to analyze the obtained data. The study requires this methodology because it delivers comprehensive insights into the NGO operations in Northeast Nigeria's distinctive sociopolitical landscape. The thematic analysis method enables researchers to concentrate on how different sources represent roles and challenges, leading to the production of practical recommendations for practitioners and policymakers, thereby making the research directly relevant for both professionals and academia.

The Roles of International NGOs in Peacebuilding in the Northeast Region of Nigeria

1. Education and Research

Aron and Angburn (2016) posit that cutting-edge research and education are essential to addressing the difficulties in achieving global peace; they should coexist with advocacy and real-world involvement in the most challenging problems. There is a negative correlation between the number of terrorist incidents and literacy, ethnic fractionalization, and development levels (Bravo & Dias, 2006). Hence, education is one of the tools that should be deployed to restore peace in the Northeast.

With an emphasis on UNICEF's work in conflict regions, Leone (2011) emphasizes the role of NGOs in education in conflict settings. His study further underscores the transformative power of education in peacebuilding, especially when implemented by NGOs (Leone, 2011). Education is one of the key areas that need to be developed and enhanced in order to put a permanent end to the issue of insurgency in Nigeria. One of the reasons why insurgency thrives in the Northeast Region of the country is because of the high level of illiteracy in the region. International NGOs need to provide classrooms, books, and other materials that will encourage people to receive education in that region.

The Nigerian Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG) is an International NGO in Nigeria that brings together NGOs, U.N. agencies, academics, and other partners to guarantee predictable, equitable, and well-coordinated education provision

for communities affected by humanitarian crises.

According to ReliefWeb (2022), EiEWG coordinated, achieved, and ensured that at the end of the humanitarian response year in 2021, the sector had reached 1.7 million conflict-affected boys and girls, trained teachers and volunteers, and worked with 44 partners. Only 6% of the beneficiaries reached by EiEWG partners are in Yobe State, whereas 24% are in Adamawa State and 69% are in Borno State.

The learning center/school enhanced access to basic, high-quality education for more than 580,000 conflict-affected, out-of-school youth (3–17 years old). 881,142 children (441,130 girls and 440,332 boys) received educational supplies, including ECD kits, in 495 temporary learning spaces/classrooms that were built, renovated, or equipped.

NGOs carry out research, contribute to advancing knowledge about contemporary issues, and create creative solutions to address social problems based on the research findings (Delisle et al., 2005). Research will help identify various problems the states have encountered and how such problems can be solved. The research study will also serve as a reference point used by civil society, individual people, international communities, and governmental organizations to identify various problems ravaging society and how such problems can be solved.

International NGOs can also research why people in that region are not attracted to education and what programs need to be implemented to ensure that the kids and teenagers among them return to school and get

the best education. Although most people in the Northeast region are religiously and ethically inclined and might find Western education difficult, the international NGO can help infuse proper education with their preferred choice of education as far as the goal of educating them is achieved. One of the goals of educating them is to make them informed and also make it extremely difficult for religious fanatics to woo them to their side of terror.

Girls Effect NGO is an international NGO that is also committed to improving education and girl child rights in Nigeria by making provision for interactive Voice Response (IVR), where girl children and women can interact with each other and also get the necessary information to enhance their gender responsibility and make them safer in the society. Delisle et al. (2005) underscore that NGOs play an important role in stewardship, resource mobilization for research, the generation, utilization, and management of knowledge, capacity development, and fostering the relevance and effectiveness of the research as well as priority setting and knowledge translation to action. They contribute at all stages of the research cycle.

2. Human Rights

Human rights play a multifarious role in peacebuilding; Okuizumi (2002) highlights the critical role of human rights in peacebuilding missions, especially regarding monitoring and addressing human rights violations that occur during and after conflicts. International NGOs such as Human

Rights Watch have been consistent in human rights, especially in the area of freedom of expression, freedom of association, accountability for serious crimes, abuses by Boko Haram, abuses by security agents, exposing corruption in government programs, and analyzing government policies to identify the problems and success of the policy. This has put the necessary agencies on their toes to guarantee human rights in the Northeast Region and Nigeria.

NGOs are essential to protecting human rights in times of conflict because they use human rights and humanitarian law to hold armed opposition groups and governments responsible (Weissbrodt, 1987). During conflict, there is likely to be the absence of law and order and the absence of rule of law in some cases. In order to ensure that the region is restored to normalcy, there has to be a high level of compliance with human rights and everyone is not discriminated against because of their gender, legitimate occupation, age, or disability; above all, everyone is given equal rights and representation before the law. For many years, International NGOs like the Red Cross have taken the lead in promoting the application of humanitarian law in times of armed conflict (Weissbrodt & Hicks, 1993).

Violation of human rights in the Northeast is alarming; by the end of the year 2022, the terrorist groups had carried out numerous attacks on civilian and governmental targets, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and injuries, numerous violations of human rights, extensive destruction, the internal emigration of over two million people, and the

external emigration of an estimated 332,000 refugees to neighboring countries (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Among the human rights that the U.S. Department of State highlighted are credible reports of wrongful and arbitrary killings, enforced disappearances, torture, instances of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the state, harsh and potentially fatal prison conditions, arbitrary arrest or detention, grave issues with the independence of the judiciary, and arbitrary or illegal invasions of privacy were among the significant human rights issues; a lack of investigation and accountability for gender-based violence, such as domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and other forms of such violence; instances of coerced abortion or forced sterilization; enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; serious government corruption; (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Despite the enormous violations of human rights in the Northeast, NGOs are vital in advancing human rights in Northeastern Nigeria (Eze, 2019).

Human Rights Watch has brought to light the need for interpreters and the insufficient evidence of those who have been prosecuted without giving adequate legal assistance. According to Human Rights Watch, the closures forced displaced people to leave the camps without warning, sufficient information, or viable alternatives for their safety and livelihoods (Ewang, 2023). International NGOs like the

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) are enlisting supporters from the government, military, and civil society to advance laws and procedures that lessen the harm done to civilians and, as part of their collaboration with the Nigerian government, created a national policy for civilian protection that would place civilians at the center of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. CIVIC also actively engaged with local communities in many local government areas to assist civilians in creating self-defense plans (Center for Civilians in Conflict, n.d.).

Some of the NGOs that have been playing credible roles in ensuring that the human rights of the people of the Northeast, as enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria, are respected and protected are Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Center for Civilians in Conflict, and others. International NGOs such as the Human Rights Watch and CIVIC also actively contribute to Northeast Nigerian peacebuilding through their activities of human rights violation monitoring and accountability enforcement while advocating for humanitarian law and working alongside the government to defend civilians in conflict areas.

3. Relief Materials

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a more significant role in the global response to armed conflict and peacebuilding. Some of these organizations work to improve peacebuilding and lessen the effects of war by promoting civil society issues, facilitating inclusion, and offering humanitarian aid (Goodhand, 2016) by making

provision for relief materials such as food, water, medicine, clothes, blankets, and other necessities that are distributed to those in need, especially in disaster or armed conflict zones (Yilmaz, 2021). As we all know, the entire recovery from the conflict can not be left in the hands of the government alone; that is why private citizens, local NGOs, and International NGOs need to come in to assist the government by providing necessities to the people so that they can continue to live and survive amid the conflicts, and more of the relief materials are to be distributed to the people after the conflict so that they can return to their base and start a new lease on life amid the insurgency crisis in the Northeast Region of Nigeria. International NGOs ensure that relief materials provided and distributed are geared towards ensuring self-sustenance (Chapagain & Raizada, 2017).

To mitigate the impact of conflicts on poverty, education, health, and hunger, especially in conflict-affected areas of the Northeast, NGOs are essential in providing relief supplies (Loganathan & Narendiran, 2016) to take decisive action against the causes and effects of hunger, poverty, health issues, and education. Action Against Hunger is an International NGO that saves the lives of malnourished children, ensures that everyone has access to clean water, food, education, and healthcare, and makes it possible for entire communities to be free from hunger (Action Against Hunger, 2023).

Other International NGOs currently in Nigeria and helping to provide relief materials in the Northeast Region of Nigeria are

Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid, Care International, Catholic Relief, Global Relief, and Christian Aid, among others.

4. Health Care

Providing services and health advocacy is one of the primary roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the health system concerning peacebuilding. NGOs provide medical, social, and psychological services as well as integration activities, care and nursing, material and financial backing, educational and information services, and training. Health advocacy involves policy support, social acceptance, and systemic support through a combination of individual and social actions (Piotrowicz & Cianciara, 2013).

NGOs are essential to delivering healthcare, especially in impoverished areas and during emergencies (Afzal & Nasir, 2023). NGOs are essential to providing healthcare in peacebuilding, especially in areas affected by conflict and with limited government resources. They help with curative care, healthcare staff training, and facility management (D'Errico et al., 2010). To ensure that quality peace is restored to the Northeast Region after the conflict, the International NGO helps renovate healthcare centers, provide medical supplies, train medical practitioners, and do other relevant work required to improve healthcare in the Northeast and Nigeria. According to D'Errico et al. (2010), peacebuilding becomes imminent when the health sector is

given effective tools for transforming conflicts.

International Medical Corps is an International NGO delivering programs focusing on clean water, sanitation, health, and nutrition. If such programs can be sustained and improved, it will go a long way in ensuring proper health care in Northeast Nigeria. Other NGOs that have been actively playing a huge role in health care delivery in the Northeast Region of Nigeria are Women and Youth Empowerment for Advancement and Health Initiative, Reconnect Health Development Initiative, Management Sciences for Health, Health Initiatives for Safety and Stability in Africa, Health Partners International, E-HEALTH Africa, and other health-related International NGOs.

5. Provision of Social Amenities

NGOs are essential to peacebuilding because they offer social services that promote inclusive development and social cohesion (McCandless & Rogan, 2013). During the conflict, a lot of social amenities, such as roads, schools, hospitals, boreholes, and other life-saving facilities, were destroyed during the insurgency. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 1.8 million people uprooted from their homes in northeastern Nigeria lack access to water, shelter, and other necessities (IOM, 2019). It was further revealed that 3.8 million people lack access to safe water, 75% of the water and sanitation infrastructure in conflict-affected areas of Northeast Nigeria has been damaged or destroyed, displaced families are putting tremendous strain

on already overburdened water and health systems in host communities, and one-third of the 700 health facilities in the hardest-hit state of Borno have been destroyed; a similar number are non-operational (World Watch Monitor, 2018).

NGOs have played a critical role in meeting the needs of the impoverished and promoting development and sustainable economic growth as they assist in providing borehole water, education materials, and building structures that can be used for health care, education, research, and other valuable purposes geared towards peacebuilding (Roy, 2017).

6. Provision of Funds

NGOs are essential in providing funding for various social and economic development projects. These funds are vital for peacebuilding, as they enable the provision of public goods and services that the government might not be able to provide (Yaping, 2018).

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan report for Northeast Nigeria includes a request for US\$1.3 billion to aid the 6 million victims of the ongoing, 13-year non-international armed conflict (OCHA, 2023). Mohammed Goni Alkali, the managing director of the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC), stressed to reporters at the State House in Abuja that the Northeast Stabilization and Development Master Plan 2020–2030 required a minimum of N31 trillion (\$80 billion) (Elumoye, 2022). It is now evident that adequate funds are needed to ensure that the peacebuilding effort in the Northeast requires a substantial amount of

money. It will be straining for the government to provide the necessary funds without the support of International NGOs like the Dangote Foundation, Bill Gates Foundation, and the Norwegian Refugee Council in order to build social amenities, fight poverty, and ensure that region-damaged infrastructures are renovated. New ones are built when necessary.

NGOs are critical in funding peacebuilding projects, frequently working with foreign donors (Yaro et al., 2023). International NGOs such as the Dangote Foundation, Bill Gates Foundation, and Norwegian Refugee Council have substantially contributed to promoting peace and providing a wider range of financial donations, programs, and services towards ensuring peace in the region (O'Brien, 2008).

7. Poverty Alleviation

Ibrahim & Haruna (2014) emphasize the connection between poverty and conflict, promoting poverty reduction as a strategy for resolving disputes; he also opined that NGOs have played a crucial role in poverty alleviation as a tool to resolve conflict and enhance peacebuilding. According to the World Bank, 70% of Northeast States are impoverished, and conflict and severe climate change further impede the region's development (Tunji, 2021). This data reveals that the poverty rate of the Northeast Region is grossly affected by the conflicts, and the people of the region need to be alleviated from poverty because poverty is one of the factors that is endearing the citizens to terrorism and all sorts of social vices like kidnapping and banditry.

Dahie (2019) asserts that achieving peace requires NGOs to have a positive influence on enhancing livelihoods, ensuring food security, and reducing poverty. NGOs have owned up to peacebuilding through various programs and approaches, such as the Economic Growth Approach, Basic Needs Approach, Rural Development Approach, and Target Approach, which are essential in reducing poverty and can help with peacebuilding (Hoque et al., 2020). NGOs are critical when it comes to poverty alleviation, especially in the area of basic needs such as food, water, and shelter, among others, as this method has been recommended as a useful tool for assessing programs aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing peace (Amofah & Agyare, 2022). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has donated US\$150.8 million this year for World Food Programme (WFP) operations in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, the states hardest hit by the conflict-driven hunger crisis. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has welcomed this significant contribution of nearly US\$100 million from the United States, which ensures continued life-saving food assistance in Northeast Nigeria through early 2018 (World Food Programme, 2017).

In the quest to reduce poverty and build peace, adult and non-formal education programs offered by NGOs have proven successful, especially when they incorporate entrepreneurship, personality development, and participatory poverty assessment. These approaches are crucial for

peacebuilding in the Northeast (Patrick & Ijah, 2012).

Almost all categories of international NGOs need to provide the programs, training, and facilities required to elevate the people from poverty. Some of the programs that need to be considered for poverty alleviation are direct assistance for the poor, as well as clean water, training for farmers, vocational training for locals, improved health care delivery, a focus on quality education, infrastructure improvements, food security, and grants for aspiring entrepreneurs. These programs will go a long way in ensuring poverty eradication in the Northeast Region of Nigeria, returning Nigeria to development, and bringing about sustainable peace in the aftermath of the conflicts.

The impediments of International NGO in peacebuilding in Northeast Region of Nigeria.

1. Limited Resources

Richmond (2013) emphasizes how limited resources can make it difficult for NGOs to operate within its framework and how there may be unforeseen repercussions when trying to promote peace. There needs to be more than the intentions and policies of international NGOs to ensure peacebuilding in the Northeastern region of Nigeria, as resources are needed to implement NGO policies and programs. It is worth noting that NGOs are not profit-making organizations; hence, they rely solely on donations, grants, and aid, as well as financial support from governments, individuals, multinational organizations, and international organizations. The

resources the NGOs need are, but are not limited to, funds, volunteers, staff, relief materials, and office spaces. The effectiveness of international NGOs in peacebuilding is severely hampered by the scarce and insufficient resources at their disposal (Kang'ethe & Manomano, 2014).

Bodi (2024) highlighted human resources as one of the main obstacles to NGOs, affecting them in peacebuilding, promoting their services, and accomplishing their goals. The high rate of illiteracy in the Northeast has made it difficult for international NGOs to attract the best skilled human resources, such as doctors, counselors, teachers, nurses, and volunteers within the region, to help man classrooms, health facilities, rehabilitation centers, and other facilities that require the presence of experts. The security situation in some states also made it difficult for NGOs to bring in experts from other regions or countries, as the supposed experts are aware of the security situation in the region.

The damage caused by the conflict in the Northeast is enormous, and adequate funding will be required to ensure that some of the projects and programs earmarked by NGOs are achieved in due time. NGOs need help finding consistent and adequate funding for their work, as they frequently do not look for funding locally but prefer to wait for approaches from foreign donors (Iraq, 2023). Considering various humanitarian crises in most of the world, international donors now have more conflicts or causes to resolve. This has even stretched the available funds, which has affected some of the international NGOs in the Northeast.

Lack of adequate funding makes it difficult for NGOs to plan and implement projects, as it puts them in a difficult situation because they have to pay for numerous operational expenses (AsianNGO, 2023). The unstable conditions of the region create problems for NGO operations by requiring additional safety measures for staff while increasing logistical expenses, which deplete limited resources and generate delays in peacebuilding implementation programs (Chakma, 2019).

2. Insecurity

Guillaume Bernardeau (2013), the then director of the International NGO Safety Organization (INSO) in Nigeria, stated that the biggest danger to non-governmental organizations operating in Northeast Nigeria is the possibility of attacks by organized armed groups. The insecurity situation in the Northeast affects virtually all the activities (recruitment, campaigns, town hall meetings, sharing of relief materials, training, advocacy, and so on) of NGOs that operate in the region, as most of them operate in constant fear and uncertainty of the safety of lives and property. In 2022, organized armed groups perpetrated 435 incidents, which led to the deaths of 396 civilians; 858 civilians were kidnapped, and 337 civilians sustained injuries in Borno State (Timings, 2023). According to a report that was released by the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB), the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB) reports that since 2016, 35 aid workers have died in Northeast Nigeria; 22 have been injured, and 28 have been abducted; as of early 2022,

six have been abducted, and one has died in the area (AWSDB, 2022). The security situation is a huge setback for the NGOs and their workers, as insecurity will hinder some of the activities of the NGOs and the morale of their volunteers. No one likes to work in an insecure environment, and even if they do, they will have their minds divided, which will likely affect the outcome of their efforts.

3. Lack of or inaccurate database

The efficacy of NGOs working in peacebuilding is severely hampered by the absence of precise and thorough data (Mack, 2014). Data accessibility makes the work of NGOs more efficient and effective and ensures that adequate plans are made for the projected beneficiaries based on the available data. Data accessibility enables NGOs to monitor a range of circumstances and activities and their effects on people and identify and categorize donors based on various criteria, which can also be used for fundraising efforts (Sriram & Kolabtree, 2018).

Furthermore, insufficient data may make it more difficult for NGOs to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and meet the needs of the local populace, which can further exacerbate the limited emphasis on self-evaluation and the marginalization of certain rights work, which can further affect the performance of the NGO in the Northeast (Olujide, 2005; Okafor, 2004). The last time a population census was conducted in Nigeria was in 2006, a testament that the country needs more accurate data on the population and its demography. The NGOs will need valid data to plan,

conduct research, make policies, and make provisions for the situation in the Northeast. This hinders NGOs' prowess in the Northeast, as most of them use projections or obsolete data, which affects the progress or outcome of their programs or policies. Masefield et al. (2020) concurred that one of the challenges NGOs face is poor data quality.

4. Customs, beliefs, and traditional sentiment

The customs and beliefs and traditional sentiments from the community determine how members respond to peacebuilding initiatives in Northeast Nigeria. International NGOs frequently underestimate this cultural factor, which directly determines how peace initiatives are received and validated by the community (Egbusie & Albert, 2021; Maiangwa, 2021). The capacity of NGOs to function independently and adapt in their local contexts affects how effective they are at promoting peace, although customs, beliefs, and traditional sentiments can be leveraged as valuable resources and sometimes pose challenges for NGOs in peacebuilding (Richmond, 2013). Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups, 2 major religions, and multiple sects of traditional religion. Each ethnic group has a way of life that is different or not too similar to other ethnic groups in the country, and this has made it difficult for programs to work in some communities in the Northeast, as the International NGOs are not accustomed to the customs and beliefs of the community. For instance, one of the traditional beliefs in some Northeast communities is that the girl child should not be exposed to the opposite sex; hence, they mostly

do not allow their girl child to attend schools, and some of them are also of the opinion that Western education should be shunned and none of their kids should be made to attend schools. These traditional beliefs will make it difficult to convince the locals that the damage that such customs and traditions have done to the larger society is more significant than the gains of the customs and traditions. Wilen & Chapaux (2011) echoed that one big obstacle facing NGOs in peacebuilding efforts is the lack of clear guidelines about the local customs and traditions, when to get involved, and under what circumstances to avoid spoilers.

Several factors, such as traditions, convictions, and traditional governance, restrict the role of non-governmental organizations (Filho, 2017). In the Northeastern region, selling or taking alcohol and some choices of dress are highly prohibited, which will deter some professionals in other states or countries from being willing to come down to the Northeast to volunteer for an NGO because the customs and beliefs of such individuals do not align with some of the harsh customs in the region. Some of these customs, beliefs, and traditions need to be relaxed to ensure that the entire environment is conducive for volunteers to operate and difficult for non-state actors such as bandits, terrorists, and kidnappers to operate. Some of these customs and beliefs deter NGOs from implementing some of their programs to promote peace in the region.

5. Illiteracy

An important obstacle to NGOs promoting peace is illiteracy, especially in recently seen conflict

areas (McCaffery, 2005). One of the major outcomes of a region that is affected by constant security challenges and poverty is illiteracy; because the people are living in constant fear and poverty, they will be scared to attend classes, and even, in some cases, the schools are under constant attacks from terrorists and armed bandits, which will put fear in the people. One of the non-kinetic approaches to solving the issue of insecurity and poverty is illiteracy because it will not make the people empowered with the right information and knowledge that will make them unemployable for the non-state actors to cause mayhem in the society.

Peacebuilding efforts are significantly hampered by illiteracy, especially in multiethnic communities like Nigeria (Adelore & Majaro-Majesty, 2008). According to UNICEF Data (2021), the illiteracy rate in the Northeast region is 50.5% for boys and 31.8% for girls, and it is so bad that 74.8% of children between the ages of 4 and 16 years have never attended schools. Based on the data above, it is evident that NGOs are working among those who are less knowledgeable and likely to get adequate support from them, which will, in turn, slow down the efforts of NGOs towards peacebuilding. Hiring efficient NGO personnel is significantly hampered by illiteracy, especially in Nigeria (Ajibade, 2009). The high illiteracy rate in the Northeast will impact the NGOs in terms of communication, cooperation, recruitment, and implementation of programs and provide crucial support for the locals.

Conclusion

Multiple distinct factors contribute to conflict in Northeast Nigeria; Alabi (2002) and Halliru (2012) both emphasize how colonialism, internal power struggles among the elite, and economic hardships feed religious and ethnoreligious conflicts, which can be further attributed to bad governance, inequality, illiteracy, poverty, and poor security architecture. In order to ensure that these conflicts are resolved, both non-kinetic and kinetic approaches should be undertaken because most of the factors causing the conflicts were not caused by arms and can not be resolved by arms alone. Hence, more concentration should be on the non-kinetics approach. NGOs and private citizens need to support the government in the area of non-kinetic actions in order to resolve the conflict and return the region to the path of peace. In addition, Choi (2009) notes that the development of a regional security community, the promotion of democracy, and the preservation of military force balance are all critical components of a peaceful resolution. These observations underscore the significance of international cooperation, security mechanisms, and domestic and international policy measures in resolving the Northeast conflict (Choi, 2009).

The state's role in fostering an atmosphere that supports NGO operations makes the relationship between NGOs and the state imperative (Clark, 1995). Several important factors highlight the need for government support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The sustainability of NGOs is greatly influenced by internally controllable factors like financial performance, organizational practices, and community interest (Gul & Morande, 2023). It is pertinent to note that the government and the people must support NGOs to perform their role

without any form of intimidation and also provide them with necessities such as security, accurate data, access to information, and other relevant materials that will aid the NGOs to perform their functions judiciously. The citizen should also imbibe the culture of maintenance and protection of projects and programs provided by the NGO so that it can continue to sustain them.

The study shows that the success of international NGO peacebuilding operations in Northeast Nigeria depends on their internal and external organizational conditions. NGOs need to improve their partnerships with other organizations to overcome their resource limitations and expertise deficits. The external success of their interventions depends on an appropriate sociopolitical environment, which requires strong governance, the rule of law, and active community participation. The study demonstrates that widespread illiteracy combined with poverty and infrastructure problems, along with security concerns, both intensifies the humanitarian crisis and blocks NGO-led initiative execution. The sustainable development of peacebuilding efforts in the region cannot function exclusively through NGO initiatives because a comprehensive system that incorporates state institutions and civil society organizations together with local community participation is needed. Long-term peacebuilding success through NGO initiatives in Northeast Nigeria requires a solution for destabilizing factors, including social discrimination and deficient public services with non-accountable governance structures.

The study makes the following recommendations for peacebuilding and solving NGOs' challenges in the Northeast Region.

- a. The government should invest more in the education sector or adopt the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) policy on education funding. Under this policy, 4-6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 15-20 percent of the public expenditure of the annual budget should be used to fund the education sector to reduce the illiteracy rate.
- b. Government policies should be people-oriented, and the rule of law should be enshrined.
- c. Infrastructural facilities and social amenities such as schools, hospitals, clean water, good roads, and recreational centers should be provided.
- d. Employment opportunities and vocational training should be made available to the people to reduce the poverty rate.
- e. The security in the region should be enhanced to protect lives and properties.
- f. NGOs should partner with traditional rulers to ensure the proper implementation of their policies and programs.
- g. NGOs should collaborate and partner with one another, particularly in areas where they face limitations or inefficiencies.

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