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ORGINAL ARTICLE

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF YOUTHS IN PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT IN BEKWARRA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Peacebuilding entails taking a proactive approach to creating environments in which sustainable peace and development can flourish. One of the most enduring quests of all human societies and civilizations throughout history has been the pursuit of peace, stability, law, and order, and Bekwarra society is no exception, as all human societies' survival and security are dependent on peace. This study examines the role of youth in peacebuilding and development in some Bekwarra communities. Structural Functionalism Theory serves as the theoretical framework for this paper. This article utilised both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. Methodologically, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered via questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study included 84 respondents, 18 interviewees, and 16 FGD participants while the results were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that, while youth in the study area play numerous roles in peacebuilding processes, there is high unemployment, minimal access to education, widespread inequality, and a temptation to engage in violent activities. The study suggests that in order to ensure youths' long-term involvement in peacebuilding and development in Bekwarra, they should be more literate, and the government should provide employment and include them as critical stakeholders in peace education, community peacebuilding initiatives, and government youth-based skills acquisition programs.

Key Words: Bekwarra, Conflict, Development, Community, Peacebuilding, Youths.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the peace and security scene has evolved rapidly over the last two decades. In the 1990s, it experienced several civil wars, armed insurrections, intermittent secessionist agitations and violence associated with elections and power succession. In more recent times, some region has witnessed an upsurge in the activities of farmers/herders' conflicts and inter-personal conflicts of different types and intensities and inter-group clashes over resource ownership and identity clashes in various communities in Nigeria which has threaten peace and security and setbacks economic and political prospects. (Nweke, 2017; Bisong & Eremi, 2018). Conflict is seen as prevalent in every society as it can occur within an individual or groups and society.

Cross River State as a whole and Bekwarra in particular stand as a microcosm of this intricate issue, grappling with a myriad of security concerns that impede social harmony, economic prosperity, and overall development. Ethno-religious tensions also pose significant challenges to peace and stability in Cross River State. The state's diverse ethnic composition, with 18 Local Government Areas, including Bekwarra and over 50 ethnic groups, and religious pluralism create opportunities for identity-based conflicts and competition over scarce resources. Historical grievances, land disputes, and political rivalries often fuel intercommunal tensions, leading to outbreaks of violence and displacement of populations (Olasupo, 2017: (UNDP, 2021). Other drivers of insecurity in Cross River State includes socio-economic disparities, which exacerbate feelings of marginalization and inequality among different segments of the population. (Okoli, Oyebode & Asala, 2024). As the landscape of security threats evolves, the youths are also affected therefore, their opinions should be included in current peace related matters in broad-spectrum and peace building in specific. Young people take on active roles before, during and after conflict. They work towards conflict prevention, build peace during conflict, deliver humanitarian support, and participate in post-conflict peace, truth and reconciliation processes in communities and in addition, the work of young people cuts across different levels and spheres of engagement within, around, and even in the absence of, an official peace process. (Ozcelik et al, 2021). Youth involvement in peace building is critical because they bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and energy to the table. Young people are more likely to be open-minded and willing to challenge traditional norms and practices that perpetuate conflict. (Saaida, 2023). Moreover, they are often more accessible to marginalized groups and can act as bridges between different communities. By engaging youth in peace building initiatives, where much can be tapped into their unique strengths and create inclusive, participatory processes that lead to sustainable development outcomes in communities. Against this backdrop that this research embarks on the exploration of youths' involvement in Peacebuilding and community development in some communities in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. With a view to bringing to light the types and causes of conflicts that exist in the study area and the predominant roles the youth play in the peace building processes and community development of the study area.

Statement of the Problem

In most communities in Africa, the youths are being relegated to the background as the adults and elders take the centre stage in most conflict resolution processes. Several indigenous research were directed on various peace building mechanisms performed by elders, there are little, or no research conducted concerning youth involvement on peace building. And there are wide varieties of studies on youth in conflict. (Abdisa & Bekuma, 2022).

In Bekwarra Community as in most indigenous communities in Africa, there are little or no research conducted which is geared towards youth participation in peace building and community development. Therefore, this study is largely envisioned to fill this research gap converging on exploring

youth involvement in peace building and community development with emphasis to some communities in Bekwarra.

More specifically, this study aims to:

i. Identify the causes of Conflicts in Bekwarra Communities
ii. Analyse youths' involvement in Peacebuilding processes and community development in the study area
iii. Describe the various challenges faced by youths in peace building processes and development in the study area.

Conceptual analysis

Concept of Youths

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. As a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age groups. (Lucas, 2023). Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist and philosopher sees the definition of youth as "just a word", and "a notion evolving over the centuries into a social construct. Youth is "a stage of life between childhood and adulthood" or the period when a person gains independency from dependency (Galstyn, 2022). Another approach suggests to defining youth as a cultural marker meaning "a distinct social status with specific roles, rituals, and relationships" (USAID, 2005)

The United Nations defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is being described in the 2007 United Nations Policy Committee as involving a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and sustainable development.

Ayodele (2019) is also of the opinion that, the genesis of peacebuilding in a pragmatic sense dates back to early civilization. However, the term peacebuilding was first introduced by the UN Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council Agenda for Peace, in 1992; in his opinion, since then, the policies of donors and multilateral and regional organisations have included a peace enhancement framework. Emergency and developmental non-governmental organisations have also come to play a crucial role in peacebuilding activities.

Acharya (2015) asserts that the conclusion of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to an increased importance of peacebuilding. He also argues that this shift in focus resulted in conflict resolution prioritising the management and settlement of intra-state conflicts. According to United Nations (2022) publications, peacebuilding refers to actions, procedures, and activities aimed at developing and maintaining peaceful communities. It entails addressing the core causes of disputes, strengthening social cohesiveness, and encouraging disputing parties' reconciliation and reintegration.

Furthermore, according to the research, peacebuilding requires a long-term approach including a variety of stakeholders, including governments, civil society organisations, the commercial sector, and international organisations. It usually consists of a mix of political, economic, social, and cultural measures aimed at minimising violence and encouraging peaceful coexistence. Conflict resolution and mediation, post-conflict rebuilding and development, supporting human rights and democracy, and enhancing governance and the rule of law are all examples of peacebuilding methods. It may also entail tackling conditions that lead to violence and instability, such as poverty, inequality, and prejudice.

Ultimately, peacebuilding seeks to create a sustainable peace that is not merely the absence of violence but a state in which people can live together peacefully and productively. To reduce structural or direct violence, peacebuilding can take the form of a direct initiative that focuses on the factors that fuel or lessen conflict. It may also refer to efforts to coordinate a multi-level, multi-sectoral strategy that includes resources and effective channels for coordination and communication within the fields of governance, security, justice, and other political spheres as well as humanitarian aid and development

According to Okoli, Ogo & Hashimu (2023), peacebuilding comprises the ability to restore relationships, institutions, and social facilities by putting in place strategies that can allow parties in conflict to re-unite. From this study point of view, peacebuilding is a comprehensive and proactive undertaking that seeks to avoid the repetition of conflict and foster enduring peace within communities or nations. It entails tackling the underlying reasons for disputes, promoting reconciliation, and establishing the essential elements for societal unity. Peacebuilding extends beyond the mere cessation of conflict, prioritising enduring stability, justice, and the welfare of individuals and communities.

Development

Development is a multidimensional process that encompasses economic growth, social progress, and political stability, aiming to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. Traditionally, development was equated with economic expansion, measured by indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and industrialisation (Todaro & Smith, 2020). However, contemporary perspectives highlight a broader understanding, incorporating human development, sustainability, and social inclusion (Sen, 1999). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines development as the expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities, ensuring access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (UNDP, 2023). Amartya Sen's capability approach emphasises that development should enhance individuals' ability to live fulfilling lives, rather than solely focusing on economic wealth (Sen, 1999). Furthermore, sustainable development, as outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions to promote long-term progress (UN, 2015).

In the context of developing nations, including Nigeria, development is often hindered by challenges such as poverty, inequality, and governance issues (World Bank, 2022). Addressing these requires a holistic approach, encompassing policy reforms, grassroots participation, and international

cooperation. Thus, development extends beyond economic indicators, encapsulating broader human and societal well-being.

Youths' involvement in peacebuilding and community development

Africa has the youngest, largest and fastest growing population in the world. Although public perceptions of youth are a mix of opportunities and threats, it is almost always the case that popular narratives see them more as threats by virtue of the risk factors associated with the violent actions of a handful of youth. Such perceptions presume that young people are easily lured into participating in violent actions in the context where widespread unemployment and socioeconomic vulnerabilities are on the rise. The active role young people play as peacemakers, mediators and peacebuilders at grassroots and local levels are under-acknowledged and they are often not included in official peace processes.

The general views on youth are negative, meaning that they are often seen as perpetrators of violence. Much research has tended to focus on the role of youth in violence advancement. Youth are often abandoned in peace building events. However, later youth are understood as active and open, they have potential to have a role both in violence advertising and in peace building. If they are provided with opportunities to socio-economic development, they can convert their violent roles and become players in peace building.

A study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (2005) states that: There is an automatic tendency to problematise youth as a factor in violent conflict while overlooking their many positive contributions to a society, including their potential role in sustaining the social fabric and peace, as well as their survival in impossible environments. In the last few years, there has been a mounting body of literature on the roles of youth in confrontation to-peace alterations, although, it remains restricted.

Empirical Review

Adeyemi & Uche (2021) examines the impact of youth empowerment programmes on economic growth, employment generation, and poverty reduction in rural communities. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the effectiveness of various government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) interventions aimed at equipping young people with skills, financial resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities. The study collected primary data from 500 respondents across six rural communities in Nigeria, using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed to measure the relationship between youth empowerment initiatives and economic development indicators, such as employment rates, income levels, and business sustainability. The findings reveal that youth who participated in targeted empowerment programmes experienced significantly higher levels of economic self-sufficiency, leading to reduced dependency on external financial support. Moreover, skill acquisition and entrepreneurial training contributed to job creation and innovation, thereby stimulating local

economies. However, the study also identified key challenges, including limited access to credit facilities, inadequate infrastructural support, and policy inconsistencies, which hinder the full realisation of youth-driven economic development. Furthermore, qualitative insights highlight the importance of community participation, mentorship, and sustainable funding in ensuring the long-term success of youth empowerment programmes. The study underscores the need for collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and civil society organisations to strengthen institutional frameworks that support youth-led economic initiatives. Policy recommendations include improving access to microfinance, integrating entrepreneurship education into formal curricula, and developing infrastructure to facilitate business growth in rural areas. This research contributes to the broader discourse on rural development by demonstrating that youth empowerment is a viable strategy for addressing unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. It calls for a multi-stakeholder approach to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of empowerment programmes, ultimately promoting inclusive economic growth. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers interested in youth engagement and economic transformation in rural settings.

Obi & Abubakar (2020) explores the role of youth-led peace initiatives in fostering sustainable peace and social cohesion in communities affected by violence. Using a qualitative research approach, the study examines how young people engage in mediation, community dialogue, and reconciliation processes to mitigate conflict. The research is based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with youth leaders, community stakeholders, and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) actively involved in peacebuilding efforts. Findings reveal that youth-led initiatives have contributed to the reduction of violent conflicts by promoting intercommunal dialogue, early warning mechanisms, and grassroots reconciliation. The study also identifies key challenges that hinder the effectiveness of youth-led peacebuilding efforts, including political marginalisation, limited access to funding, and a lack of institutional support from governmental agencies. Despite these challenges, young people remain critical actors in conflict resolution, demonstrating resilience, adaptability, and innovation in addressing communal disputes. The study further highlights that effective youth engagement in peacebuilding requires an enabling environment, including policies that recognise and support youth-led initiatives. The role of technology and social media is also emphasised, as these platforms have been instrumental in mobilising youth for peace advocacy and awareness campaigns. Additionally, partnerships between government institutions, international organisations, and local youth groups are recommended as strategies to enhance the sustainability of youth peace initiatives. The study concludes that investing in youth capacity-building, leadership training, and inclusive governance structures will strengthen the role of young people in peacebuilding. It recommends that policymakers and development agencies prioritise youth empowerment as a strategic approach to conflict prevention and resolution in Nigeria. Future research should explore the long-term impact of youth-led peace interventions, and the effectiveness of policy frameworks designed to integrate young people into national peacebuilding strategies.

Okon, James & Effiong (2022) examines the extent, challenges, and impact of youth involvement in governance and local development projects in Cross River State, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected survey data from 300 respondents, including youth leaders, community members, and government officials, while also conducting in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. The findings reveal that young people play a crucial role in various aspects of community development, including infrastructure projects, environmental conservation, and advocacy for good governance. However, despite their contributions, youth participation remains significantly constrained by socio-political barriers such as exclusion from decision-making processes, limited access to resources, and lack of institutional support. The study highlights that although government programmes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have made efforts to promote youth inclusion, these initiatives often lack long-term sustainability and fail to address systemic barriers. Additionally, cultural perceptions that undermine youth leadership further restrict their active involvement in governance. The research suggests that strengthening institutional frameworks, providing capacity-building programmes, and fostering inclusive governance structures can enhance youth participation. It also emphasises the need for policy reforms that prioritise youth engagement in decision-making and development planning at the local government level. Furthermore, the study identifies technology and digital platforms as emerging tools that can enhance youth activism and community mobilisation. Social media and digital governance initiatives have provided young people with alternative avenues to influence policy and hold leaders accountable. However, the digital divide and lack of internet accessibility in rural areas pose significant challenges to leveraging these technologies effectively. The study concludes that sustainable community development in Cross River State requires a paradigm shift towards inclusive governance, where young people are recognised as active stakeholders rather than passive beneficiaries. It calls for a collaborative approach among government agencies, civil society, and the private sector to create policies and programmes that harness the potential of youth for long-term community development.

Theoretical Framework

The Structural Functionalism Theory is a sociological perspective that views society as a complex system with interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability and social order. This theory posits that each structure within society—such as institutions, norms, and values—plays a crucial role in sustaining harmony (Parsons, 1951). Social institutions, including education, government, and family, function to regulate behaviour, resolve conflicts, and promote cohesion.

The theory was initially developed by Émile Durkheim in the late 19th century and later expanded by Talcott Parsons in the mid-20th century. Durkheim (1893) argued that society is like an organism where different parts must function collectively to sustain order. Parsons (1951) further developed this idea, asserting that societies operate based on shared norms and values that contribute to overall stability.

Basic Assumptions of the Theory

i. **Society as a System** – Society consists of interdependent structures that work together to maintain equilibrium.
ii. **Functionality of Institutions** – Every institution in society serves a purpose, such as socialising individuals or resolving conflicts.
iii. **Value Consensus** – Social cohesion is achieved when members of society share common values and norms.
iv. **Adaptation and Change** – While society is generally stable, gradual change occurs to ensure its survival and progress (Parsons, 1951).

Applicability and Relevance to Youths in Peacebuilding and Development

The Structural Functionalism Theory is highly relevant to the study of youths' roles in peacebuilding and development in Bekwarra Community, Cross River State, Nigeria. Youths serve as crucial social agents within institutions such as family, education, and governance, helping to promote stability and development.

i. **Youth as Social Cohesion Agents** – Through advocacy and mediation, young people help foster unity and prevent conflicts in their community.
ii. **Economic Development Contribution** – Engaging in entrepreneurial activities, agriculture, and vocational skills training, youths enhance economic growth.
iii. **Educational and Cultural Preservation** – As part of social institutions, youths disseminate values that sustain community identity and social order.
iv. **Policy Influence and Governance Participation** – Involvement in governance and community leadership ensures the representation of youth interests in development initiatives.

By understanding their role within the community's structural framework, youths can effectively contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable development, reinforcing the societal balance envisioned by Structural Functionalism.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). These methods facilitated a robust analysis by capturing both numerical trends and in-depth insights.

The quantitative component involved administering structured questionnaires to 84 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions designed to measure key variables systematically. This approach allowed for the collection of quantifiable data, which provided measurable trends and patterns across the respondent group.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 participants. These interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of individual perspectives, providing rich contextual insights beyond the numerical data. The semi-structured format enabled flexibility, allowing interviewees to elaborate on their responses while ensuring consistency in the topics covered.

Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with 16 participants to encourage dynamic discussions and collective viewpoints. The FGDs were structured to explore shared experiences, emerging themes, and group interactions that might not be as evident in individual interviews. The discussions were guided by a set of predetermined topics while allowing room for organic dialogue.

The collected data were analysed using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and averages. This method enabled the identification of general trends and patterns within the dataset, facilitating objective comparisons and interpretations.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analysed using thematic analysis. This process involved transcribing the responses, coding key themes, and identifying recurring patterns. Thematic analysis allowed for the systematic categorisation of qualitative insights, providing a nuanced understanding of respondents' experiences and perspectives.

The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. Participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the research, and their data were anonymised to maintain privacy. The study also ensured that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this methodology ensured a well-rounded analysis, combining statistical rigour with depth of insight to provide a holistic understanding of the research topic.

Results and Analysis

Analysis was based on 84 returned questionnaire from the respondents,

Table 1: The causes of Conflicts in Bekwarra Communities

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Land Disputes	20	23.8
Chieftaincy and Leadership Tussles	31	37
Resource Competition	10	12
Ethnic and Communal Clashes	18	21.4
Youth Restiveness and Crime	5	6
Total	**84**	**100**

Sources: Field survey, 2025

The analysis of conflict causes in Bekwarra communities shows that Chieftaincy and Leadership Tussles are the most frequent cause, accounting for 37% of conflicts. This indicates a significant struggle over traditional and political leadership. Land Disputes follow closely at 23.8%, reflecting the agrarian nature of the community and the importance of land ownership. Ethnic and Communal Clashes contribute 21.4%, highlighting tensions with neighboring communities. Resource Competition represents 12%, suggesting disputes over access to economic and natural resources. Youth Restiveness and Crime account for the least at 6%, but it remains a concern. These findings emphasize the need for conflict resolution strategies in governance, land administration, and youth engagement programs.

Table 2: The involvement of youths in local governance positively impacts community development.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	16	19.1
Agree	33	39.3
Strongly Disagree	14	16.7
Disagree	17	20.2
Undecided	4	4.8
Total	**84**	**100**

Sources: Field survey, 2025

The data indicates that most respondents (58.4%) acknowledge the positive impact of youth involvement in local governance on community development, with 19.1% strongly agreeing and 39.3% agreeing. This suggests that many believe youth participation enhances decision-making and fosters sustainable development. However, 36.9% of respondents expressed disagreement, with 16.7% strongly disagreeing and 20.2% disagreeing, indicating concerns or perceived limitations in youth engagement. A small percentage (4.8%) remained undecided, reflecting some level of uncertainty. Overall, while there is significant support for youth involvement in governance, the notable disagreement suggests potential barriers such as lack of opportunities, inadequate representation, or challenges in integrating youth perspectives into governance structures.

Table 3: Major Challenges Faced by Youths in Contributing to Peacebuilding and Development in the Community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of inclusion in decision-making	17	20.2
Unemployment and poverty Political manipulation and violence Lack of education and awareness	35	41.6

Cultural and traditional barriers	13	15.5
Total	16	19
	3	3.5
	84	**100**

Sources: Field survey, 2025

The analysis of challenges faced by youths in peacebuilding and development in Bekwarra communities reveals that Unemployment and Poverty is the most significant issue, accounting for 41.6%. This highlights the economic struggles that hinder youth participation in peace efforts. Lack of Inclusion in Decision-Making follows at 20.2%, showing that youths are often excluded from governance and peace initiatives. Lack of Education and Awareness contributes 19%, indicating the need for enlightenment programs. Political Manipulation and Violence at 15.5% suggest that youths are sometimes used as tools in conflicts. Lastly, Cultural and Traditional Barriers at 3.5% show minimal but existing restrictions. Addressing these issues is vital for sustainable peace and development.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study highlight key causes of conflicts in Bekwarra communities, the impact of youth involvement in governance, and the challenges youths face in peacebuilding and development. These findings were further validated through interview responses and focus group discussions (FGDs), aligning with existing empirical research on conflict resolution and youth participation in governance.

The data indicate that Chieftaincy and Leadership Tussles are the leading cause of conflict, representing 37% of cases. This was corroborated by an interview with a traditional leader, who stated, *"The struggle for leadership positions within our communities often leads to disputes among different families and clans, sometimes escalating into violent conflicts."* Another interview respondent, a community elder, remarked, *"Many of these leadership disputes arise because of unclear succession plans and external political influences."*

FGDs further reinforced these findings. Group 1 participants noted that land disputes, accounting for 23.8%, were a major source of contention due to the agrarian nature of Bekwarra. One participant explained, *"Land is our primary source of livelihood. When boundaries are unclear, conflicts arise, sometimes leading to long-standing feuds."* Group 2 participants highlighted the role of ethnic and communal clashes (21.4%) in fuelling violence, particularly when resources are scarce.

The study found that 58.4% of respondents agreed that youth involvement in local governance positively impacts community development. This suggests that youth participation fosters innovation, inclusivity, and proactive governance. However, 36.9% disagreed, indicating concerns over structural

barriers. In an interview, a local government official acknowledged these challenges, stating, *"While youth involvement is essential, many young people lack the experience and resources to actively engage in governance."*

FGD participants in Group 1 expressed frustration with the limited roles assigned to youths, noting that they are often used for political campaigns but excluded from actual decision-making. Meanwhile, Group 2 participants highlighted successful youth-led initiatives, showing that when empowered, young people can contribute significantly to community progress.

The findings reveal that Unemployment and Poverty (41.6%) are the biggest obstacles preventing youth participation in peacebuilding. This aligns with empirical studies showing that economic hardship can drive young people towards violence or disengagement. A respondent from an FGD noted, *"Without jobs, many youths are easily recruited into conflicts or political manipulation."*

Lack of Inclusion in Decision-Making (20.2%) and Lack of Education and Awareness (19%) were also significant barriers. Political Manipulation and Violence (15.5%) further hinder youth participation, with one FGD participant stating, *"Politicians exploit unemployed youths for their own gain, making peacebuilding difficult."*

The study underscores the need for inclusive governance, economic empowerment, and education reforms to address conflicts and promote peacebuilding in Bekwarra communities. These findings align with empirical research that advocates for youth empowerment as a key strategy in conflict resolution and sustainable development.

Conclusion

The study underscores the need for inclusive governance, economic empowerment, and education reforms to address conflicts and promote peacebuilding in Bekwarra communities. The findings demonstrate that leadership struggles, land disputes, and ethnic tensions are primary sources of conflict, while youth engagement in governance has the potential to drive sustainable development. However, unemployment, exclusion from decision-making, and political manipulation continue to limit their contributions.

Recommendations

i. Policies should be implemented to ensure that youths are actively involved in decision-making processes at local and community levels. This can be achieved through mentorship programmes and leadership training.
ii. The government and stakeholders should invest in skill acquisition and entrepreneurship initiatives to tackle unemployment and reduce youth vulnerability to manipulation and violence.
iii. Community leaders and policymakers should develop structured peacebuilding initiatives that educate youths on non-violent conflict resolution and foster inter-community dialogue to reduce ethnic and leadership tensions.

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