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Edited by

Isaac O. Albert  
Kayode M. Samuel  
Benjamin A. Aluko

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## Leadership, Peace and Cultural Diplomacy in Nigeria

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## Leadership, Legitimacy and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Idowu Johnson, Ph.D\*

### Abstract

While there exist several studies devoted to evaluating the leadership question in Nigeria, there is still a lot of ground to cover on the issue of leadership, legitimacy and peace building. This paper argues that the prevalence of internal conflicts, the attendant insecurity and political instability have been obstacles to peace and development in Nigeria. Central to the discourse is that the situation that exists in many parts of the country today where crimes, kidnapping, violent conflicts and other social vices reign supreme, is a challenge to the quality, creativity, and competence of Nigeria's leadership at all levels. Weak legitimacy has hindered the selection of contested representation within the context of conflict resolution. Thus, the unresolved legitimate representation for peace processes has continued to escalate violent conflicts. Legitimacy is widely recognised as central to peace building. Drawing experience from local governance arrangement from across developed democracies, legitimate community representatives have not only provided basic law, security and effective conflict resolution, but have also helped to solidify inter-communal peace accords at the grassroots level. In spite of this leadership crisis, performance legitimacy can serve as an effective instrument for national peace processes in Nigeria. Hence, the prospect for managing violent conflicts in the interest of peace building and sustainable development is inherent in the application of legitimacy performance.

### Introduction

Since 1960 when Nigeria became an independent country, violent conflicts have tended to be widespread, more diverse and have created varied opinions about economic growth in the country. It has been observed that the Nigerian independence brought with it a myriad of problems, perceived initially as minor and at best as some of the characteristics

of newly independent states. Such problems were the rise of ethnic hegemony and ethnic identities, the scramble for resources and its allocations, the Nigerianisation of the public service and the minority question, among others. It is important to note that Nigerian politics have been partially characterised by ethnic disparity and political distrust. Furthermore, conflicts in Nigeria are usually

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due to boundary issues and land resources. With the rise of ethnicism and ethnic nationalities as political identities and increasing youth militancy, various riots and violent confrontations deriving from ethnic, religious, economic and political motivations have become common in the nation (Oruwari, 2006; Alubo, 2006; Aghalino, 2008; Egwu, 2001).

The economic and political consequences of violent conflicts are enormous in Nigeria. In the same vein, the government and its agencies have always employed the top-down approach along with forceful intervention that in the short run curtails the problem which erupts again in the long run. However, peacebuilding and conflict management strategies became a topical issue in Nigeria in the late 1990s following the high level of unrest that was found in the wake of the establishment of civil rule after many years of military dictatorship. Meanwhile, in order to have peace, legitimacy and leadership qualities are required. Legitimacy is widely recognised as critical to peace, development and effective governance (Wennmann, 2013). For Nigeria, leadership and legitimacy crisis have been obstacles for an enduring peace process. This paper therefore, examines critical issues of leadership, legitimacy and peacebuilding, and pays much attention to positive experience from developing democracies. The discussion in this paper is divided into six parts after the introduction. The first section deals with conceptual and theoretical issues. The second is an overview of internal conflicts in Nigeria. This is followed by analysis of leadership and legitimacy crisis in resolving conflicts in Nigeria; an assessment of leadership, legitimacy and

peacebuilding in selected developing democracies, lessons for Nigeria; and conclusion.

### Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

There are many definitions of leadership. Obi (2002: 4) observed that leadership finds expression at the individual, family, group, community, national, regional and even global levels. According to Graig (2005: 132) leadership is defined as a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organisational goals. While Nwolise and Ohaemesi (2001) affirm that leadership as a social phenomenon denotes the occupancy of states and the active performance of a role that mobilises more or less organised collective and voluntary effort toward the attainment of shared goals and objectives. In the view of Aguda (1995) a person may attain the position of leadership in one of several ways. The first method is self imposition, which is totally devoid of constitutionality. Secondly, a group of persons may forcefully impose a leader on the generality of the people. In the same vein, leadership can be attained through electoral process, i.e. through election.

With the complex issues surrounding leadership, it has become essential to break the concept down into specifics. Mostafa Rejai and Kay Phillips (cited in Adebayo, 2007: 9-10) provide this breakdown. In their view, leadership refers to life experiences and life chances that:

- (1) Imbue a person with a vision and a set of goals;
- (2) Endow that person with the skill to articulate the vision and the goals in

such a way as to attract a significant following;

- (3) Provide that person with the skill to specify the means and to organise and mobilise the followers toward the realisation of the vision and the goals; and
- (4) Give that person sufficient understanding of the followers in order to devise and pursue goals that are rewarding to both the leader and the followers.

The working definition of leadership for this paper is the one provided by Fafowora *et al* (1995). They see leadership as implying a purposeful direction of the affairs of the led – some movement towards definite and defined goal – which will be to the benefit of society and such leadership is characterised by imaginativeness (i.e. possessing ideas which can be translated into reality), courage (to stand on principle and by its decisions so as to be able to provide moral, social and motivational climate for its followership) and discipline.

The concept of “legitimacy” on the other hand is not new. Legitimacy or legitimate authority implies popular perception, belief and acceptance by the citizens of a state that its government or leader has the right to exercise the power to rule (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). For Ogundiya (2008) legitimacy is the foundation of political power inasmuch as it is exercised both with a consciousness on the part of the government that it has a right to govern and with the recognition by the governed of that right. Thus, legitimacy lies at the heart of acceptance of any government.

Razi (1987: 461) submits that legitimacy could be applied in two ways. The first

meaning refers to a set of basic norms or moral standards which relate to politics and are by and large, commonly shared. The second meaning of legitimacy refers to the extent to which a regime engages in legitimate behaviour, or more precisely, the extent to which the relevant portion of the population perceives that the regime is behaving accordingly. Legitimacy is also underscored by the belief that legal authority is not a sufficient basis for demanding respect and obedience from the ruled. More important is morality, which implies that rule should not only be legal; it must be morally right.

Peacebuilding is a term used to address the post-conflict environment appropriately to accomplish a full-scale recovery of war-torn states. Johan Galtung coined the term in his pioneering work “Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding”. In his article, Galtung posited that peace has a structure different from, perhaps over and above, peacekeeping and ad hoc peacemaking. As Galtung rightly puts it:

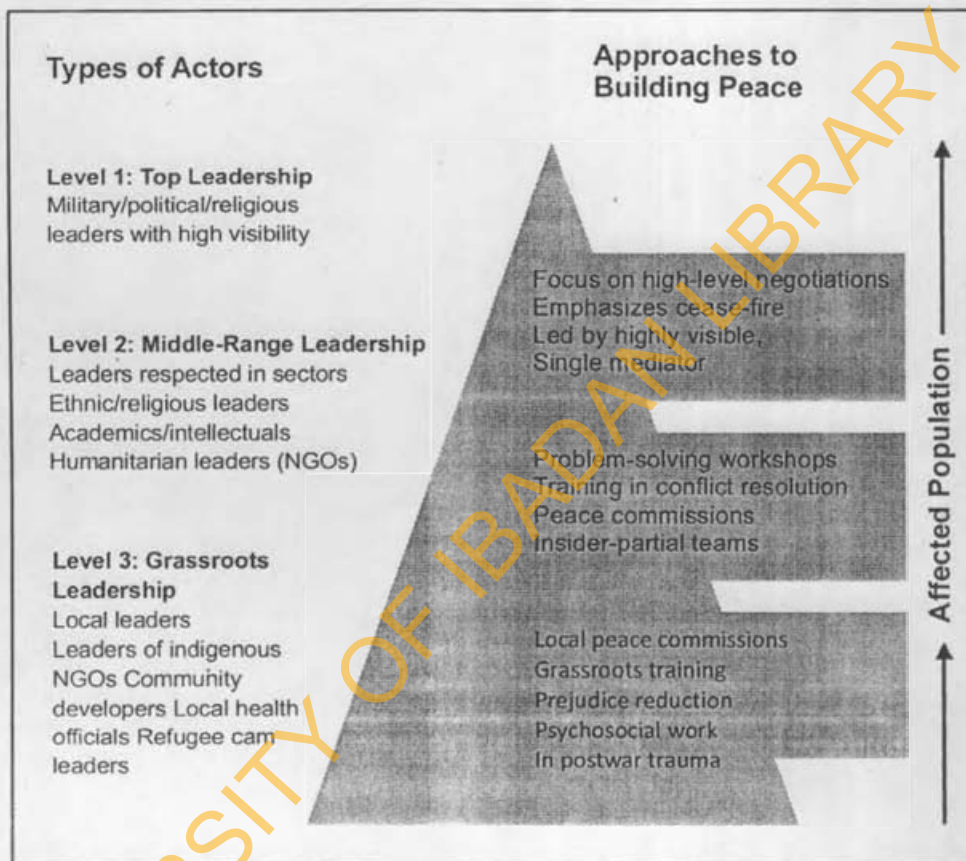
The mechanisms that peace is based on should be built into the structure and be present as a reservoir for the system itself to draw up . . . More specifically, structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur (Galtung, 1976).

Similarly, peacebuilding is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflicts toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships (Lederach, 1997:20). Thus, peacebuilding includes the identification and support of measures and structures which will promote peace and build trust and

interaction among former enemies, in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.

The theoretical issue here is whether leadership and legitimacy are crucial to peace, development and effective governance. This

brings us to Lederach's theoretical paradigm of explaining the phenomenon of peacebuilding. Much of the theories and practice around peacebuilding have been developed around J.P. Lederach's Pyramid.



Lederach's model illustrates the peacebuilding process as involving interaction between all the layers. However, it is often those at the grassroots who have experienced conflict most intensely. So it is leadership on the ground that is often best placed to facilitate community-led peacebuilding initiatives. Peacebuilding is reliant on the activities of grassroots communities. Communities need support, resources and an enabling environment to deliver the change. This process relates to the key issues which Lederach refers to as

catalyst for realising sustainable reconciliation, relationships, encounters and creating the social space. Thus, community peacebuilding is the activity through which social change and reconciliation can be realised.

### An Overview of Internal Conflicts in Nigeria

The dynamics of internal conflicts in Nigeria has become worrisome both to the government and the citizens. To be sure, Nigeria is deeply divided by regional,



religious, ethnic, economic and political rifts, and these have been used and abused in local and national politics. Indeed, Nigerian politics since independence in 1960 has been a product of disharmony, suspicion, mistrust and antagonism. This was evident in the tense relations between the northern and southern regions of the country during the latter part of the colonial era. One of the most significant cleavages, historically and politically, is the north-south divide, mainly based on the historic and religious divide between the Muslims of the north and Christians and animists of the south (Amundson, 2012). Furthermore, Nigeria's confrontation with incidents of severe conflict ranges from secession attempt by the eastern region to a devastating civil war (1967 to 1970) which resulted in the division of the country from three political regions, at independence, to 12 states in 1967, and then 36 states in 1996. However, this fragmentation has been unsuccessful in reducing fears and tensions in the country (Obase and Okeke-Uzodike, 2013).

The Niger Delta has been the main area of Nigeria's petroleum extraction and currently produces about 90 percent of the country's oil. At the same time, the area is densely populated and a nightmare for the oil companies. The last decade has been characterised by a remarkable degree of civil strife, kidnappings, sabotage, environmental degradation, international condemnation, and production stoppages caused by local protesters and criminal gangs. The best-known protest and violent repression took place in Ogoniland in the 1990s. Ogoniland is a small region in the oil-rich south-west of the Niger

Delta. The Ogoni and the others were forced to abandon their land without consultation and offered negligible compensation, and dozens of people were murdered. The author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was arrested in connection with the killings and ensuing riots, and was sentenced to death in 1995 by a tribunal hand-selected by President Abacha, and hanged (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 232-233). In addition, the activities of militant groups in the Niger Delta were highly volatile with the formation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In 2006 MEND successfully carried out many violent and sabotage acts in the Niger Delta region (Abolurin, 2012: 259).

More importantly, religious crises and control of resources are major causes of conflicts in Nigeria. The northern region of the country, particularly the areas of Maiduguri, Kano and Zaria, is well known for incidences of religious conflicts, while the so-called "south-south" geo-political zone of the country is known for crises sparked by the quest for control of resources, advocacy for environmental protection and disputes around ethnicity. Nigeria's middle-belt region is increasingly affected by conflicts which spill over from the northern and southern parts of the country, with the consequence that this region is gradually evolving into another battleground for ethnic, political, social and economic control. States such as Plateau and Benue have witnessed serious conflicts since 1994 (Obaje and Okeke-Uzodike, 2013).

Although the northern part of Nigeria experienced disputes by different reasons in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the emergence of Boko Haram Islamist terrorist

group has adversely affected Nigeria's socio-economic development and its national security. The Boko Haram, which literally means "Western civilisation is a sin" started in 2002 with the objective of restoring Islamic legal system (Sharia in the north). It has been observed by Abolurin (2012) that Boko Haram is an outgrowth of the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the religious/ethnic tensions that followed in the late 1990s. Thus, the activities and attacks of the Boko Haram can best be understood within the context of the global jihad movement. In spite of government efforts to arrest the ugly situation created by the menace of Boko Haram terror activities, the group has continued to wreck havoc on the Nigerian State with massive destruction of lives and properties.

### Leadership and Legitimacy Crisis in Resolving Internal Conflicts in Nigeria

The quest for the right leadership is, perhaps, the most prominent issue that Nigeria and its people have grappled with since 1960 when the country attained political independence. Thus, the unresolved leadership question in the country is central to the resolution of the crisis and challenges of development in Nigeria (Yagboyaju, 2010). Throughout the whole world, there has been an urgent desire among various people and government for unity, justice, peace and stability. The resurgence of this desire is not only explicable through their political policies alone; but also it is reflected in the social and economic policies (Afegbua and Adejuwon, 2012: 141). For too long, Nigerian governments have been undergoing serious and deepening politico-economic crisis. These problems generated by political, social and

economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal and religious crises, which have bedeviled Nigeria, call attention to the problems of leadership and legitimacy in Nigeria.

Quite obviously, the Nigerian political leadership (past and present, military and civilian) as well as the country's established institutions have always been suffering from certain legitimacy problems which stem from the nature of its authority, composition (ethnic, religious, regional), intelligibility, visibility, and the way it acts as the *locus classicus* of decision making. In essence, the political leaders of Nigeria, both military and civilian, face numerous dilemmas in trying to secure acceptance, support and/or political allegiance (Ogundiya, 2009: 132). There is no explicit formulation of any systems values. As Ake and Onoge (1995: 53) rightly observed:

Political leadership is parochial rather than national; and corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Ethnic diversity is manipulated to stay afloat to the detriment of national cohesion. There is an embarrassing lack of national heroes. The failure was usually explained either by the easy manipulability of the cultural pluralist background, or by the "two publics" antagonism.

It is important to state that the consequence for state/leadership legitimacy is that the average Nigerian finds it difficult to repose confidence in the same sets of political office holders (or their children) who have failed more than once and who remain unrepentant in their extravagant and reckless behaviour (Ogundiya, 2009). Thus, the failure of the Nigerian state under the democratic and military régimes frustrates people's hope and expectations which invariably lead to the

withdrawal of their trust from the state, régime or leadership. It is not surprising therefore, that the staggering wave of violence, insecurity, increasing crime wave, economic recession, coupled with the break in law and order are the attributes to the problems of leadership and legitimacy in Nigeria. Therefore, the quest for good leadership and performance legitimacy is a *sine qua non* for an effective conflict resolution and sustainable peace in Nigeria.

### **An Assessment of Leadership, Legitimacy and Peacebuilding in Selected Developing Democracies**

The current international context and debate on peace and security, point to the growing role of local governance arrangements as a core pillar for effective conflict management, peace building and post conflict state building. International peace actors have repeatedly observed that the most legitimate community representatives are often found in local-level governance systems that either survive or spring up to provide basic protection and order in dangerous, lawless environments (Menkhaus, 2012). In this regard, international mediators have wanted to tap into local administrations and their leaders as participants in peace processes. Local leaders are in much closer contact with the community, so constituencies enjoy a degree of communication, information, oversight and voice that enhances the legitimacy of the governance structure. They can also draw on customary and religious laws that local communities know and understand.

This section of the paper examines some case studies where performance legitimacy has helped in grassroots representation and peace processes.

#### *Lebanon*

Following the July-August 2006 war that affected Beirut and the South of the country, local authorities emerged as key players in partnership with international agencies to support recovery and rehabilitation. Given the intensity of the conflict and related suffering of the population, there has been a popular outcry for a stronger municipal crisis response and basic welfare provision (Hill and Ali-Ahmad, 2007). As a result, international aid agencies partnered with local authorities to ensure that they would serve as effective channels for postconflict relief and development. Within this approach, local government structures provided key assistance in several ways including rubble removal, rehabilitation of key municipal infrastructure, assessment of postwar damage, and rehabilitation of livelihood. Municipalities were not passive recipients or channels for international assistance. Rather, during the early recovery process, local governments in Lebanon engaged in participatory problem solving, planning, and decision making. Operational procedures, including contracts, work plans, and timetables, systematised the involvement of local governments in relief efforts. They also served as channels to revive economic activity and to encourage inter-communal peacebuilding and reconciliation (Hill and Ali-Ahmad, 2007: 14).

Basically, the role of local government in basic service delivery lies at the nexus between peacebuilding, state building, and recovery. Thus, improved and equitable access to basic services such as education, water and health is an important means of legitimising and strengthening local government institutions as

part of the peacebuilding effort. This legitimacy can be further enhanced with real participation and leadership of local government in the local level recovery processes. From Lebanon's case, the ability of local governments to respond to the popular call for increased crisis response and the partnership with international agencies bolstered the role of municipalities and the way they were perceived by the local population. As Lebanon also shows, commencing with the work of humanitarian and recovery actors, local government authorities, based on their knowledge of the local contexts can ensure that basic service delivery for the local populations responds to the needs and priorities of the local communities, and that community members are engaged in the decision making processes that will affect their lives (Dabo *et al*, 2012).

#### *Timor-Leste*

After the devastating 2006 political crisis in Timor-Leste, which triggered the emergence of more than 100,000 IDPs, both presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2007 to restore confidence in and the legitimacy of the Timor-Leste government. The president and prime minister promoted the need for dialogue. The participation of all sections of society was deliberately pursued and it resulted in numerous dialogue initiatives by both government and civil society. Dialogue processes took place at national and local levels, and within specific sectors (such as security and youth). Zacarias Albano da Costa, the Minister of Foreign Affairs claims that the current government has been constitutional from the beginning and has been increasing

its legitimacy by solving the social problems caused by the 2006 crisis (Higashi, 2009). The Minister asserts that the government assisted IDPs to return to their villages by providing recovery package, initiated a pension system for former guerrilla soldiers fighting for independence, and reconciled with 600 petitioners in the Timor army whose petitions and appeals to the government were an initial trigger of the 2006 crisis; and all of them created social stability that Timor-Leste desperately needs (Higashi, 2009:3).

At the same time, Sergio de Mello (the head of the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor; (UNTAET), held excellent meetings with local people to hear their voices and make people understand the policies of UNTAET. His attitude to the Timorese was largely respected by the people. One can argue that the perception of local people about de Mello's efforts to reach local people even in local areas is an indication that continuous dialogue between political leaders and local people in each district is a necessary condition for a sustainable peace and development. In essence, the sustained efforts to have dialogue with local people by political leaders belonging to different parties will increase the support and the legitimacy of the political institutions in East Timor.

#### *El Salvador*

Negotiations between rival gangs in El Salvador were largely seen as illegitimate, especially the middle and upper classes opposed negotiating with gangs, whom they saw as criminal and responsible for death and destruction. Negotiations nevertheless went ahead discretely between two gangs

accompanied by two facilitators, based on the recognition by the parties that the level of violence was no longer sustainable (Wennmann, 2013). Once the truce negotiations became public, discussion about the legitimacy of the process took centre stage.

It is crucial for us to recognise that the transformation of gangs from illegitimate to legitimate actors in Salvadoran society is contested. While the gangs agreed to stop violence, many other practices such as extortion and threats of violence remained. Nevertheless, the truce led to the establishment of “peace zones” in which gang and non-gang populations are seeking to help youth exit gangs permanently. However, gang leaders used negotiations to increase internal legitimacy. Gang leaders strengthened internal control over group membership and territory. But the truce moved forward; and they also realised the need for social acceptability so that peace zones could continue to survive. This could mean the entry of gangs into politics such as through the establishment of organised political wings. As a matter of fact, if peace zones stay violence-free and the quality of life for people living in them increases; gang leaders will likely gain in internal and external legitimacy.

#### *Somaliland*

One of the most remarkable multi-level dialogue processes took place in Somaliland, the self-declared independent state that broke away from Somalia. In the absence of effective functioning of state institutions in Somalia, following the fall of the Barre regime in 1991, the process of state building in the region of Somaliland is noteworthy for the extent of

dialogue that preceded and informed it. The process consisted, firstly, of peace conferences at the local level sub-clans. The peace conferences brought contiguous and interdependent sub-clans together under the leadership of the elders of each sub-clan. These local conferences, which depended heavily on the customary authority of the elders and involved lengthy discussions that took months in some cases, resulted in agreements that clarified issues of responsibility and leadership and that dealt effectively with the high level of violence (Odendaal, 2011: 14).

Following the local conferences, peace conferences were conducted at increasingly higher levels, eventually, it culminated in the Grand Borama Peace Conference in 1991 that was attended by more than five hundred elders and lasted for more than six months. One of its outcomes was the decision to secede from Somalia and seek international recognition as an independent state – an objective not yet achieved (Van Brabant, 2011; Lederach, 1997).

#### *Lessons for Nigeria*

In all the cases cited above, it is evident that local leadership is a critical element of sustainable peace. Peace is inherently “local” – i.e. as close as possible to both the conflict problems and solutions. Local leadership is what makes peace sustainable – or makes peace “stick”. There is no doubt that the manifestations of political instability in Nigeria are the symptoms of basic system pathology, namely a crisis of legitimacy. It should be noted that a conflict situation or violent conflict cannot be brought to rest, managed or transformed, without adequately exploring how legitimate performance could be redirected for the

attainment of sustainable peace in Nigeria. There are examples of dialogue processes that have the objective to address a specific national challenge, but that are structured to take place at various levels of society. Typically, dialogue would take place at the local level, which would then feed into higher level processes that may culminate in a summit meeting (Odendaal, 2011).

From the foregoing, a lot of lessons can be learned by Nigeria. First, local people are best placed to make an accurate diagnosis of any conflict; and also to define the response. Secondly, legitimate local governance systems in violent settings work because they embody and advance shared communal interests in law, order, security, predictability, basic regulatory functions and access to markets and basic services. In addition, bringing in legitimate local government leaders can help inject a greater level of representation and popular voice into wider peace process. Finally, local leaders are in much closer contact with the community, so constituencies enjoy a degree of communication, information, oversight and voice that enhances the legitimacy of the governance structure. They can also draw on customary and religious laws that local communities know and understand.

## Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to document the relevance of leadership, legitimacy and peace building in Nigeria. The search for leadership in Nigeria is a search for social justice, equity and redistribution of resources. The use by Nigerian elites of arbitrary and repressive measures and their inability to apply governmental regulations

throughout the national territory is a sign of state weakness. Thus, the numerous problems which have been bedeviling Nigeria vis-à-vis ethnic, religious and communal clashes have been blamed on ineffective leadership and legitimacy crisis. However, it is important for Nigerian leaders to obtain construct legitimacy in the eyes of local people and leaders in order to resolve conflicts and guarantee sustainable peace. Local governance is about networks, relationships, partnerships with local leaders and people. It is the solving of leadership and legitimacy crisis that will automatically lead to an effective conflict resolution and sustainable peace in Nigeria.

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