Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.9 No.1 March, 2026; p.g. 205 – 215; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES IN PREVENTING COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Communal violence, as a manifestation of weak social cohesion and conflict management systems, persists despite the presence of local peace committees, raising concerns about their effectiveness in addressing underlying drivers of conflict. This study examined the effectiveness of local peace committees in preventing communal violence in Osun State, Nigeria, with a focus on early warning, dialogue promotion, and sustainable peace outcomes. A quantitative explanatory research design was adopted, using a self-designed instrument titled Effectiveness of Local Peace Committees in Preventing Communal Violence Questionnaire (ELPCPCVQ). The instrument was validated through a pilot study and achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha. A sample size of 300 respondents was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that local peace committees significantly facilitated early warning and conflict prevention (grand mean = 3.10), significantly promoted dialogue and social cohesion (grand mean = 3.09), and significantly influenced sustainable peace and reduction of communal violence (grand mean = 3.08), leading to the rejection of all three null hypotheses. The study concluded that local peace committees are effective grassroots mechanisms for conflict prevention when adequately supported. It was recommended that institutional capacity-building initiatives be strengthened to improve their operational effectiveness, while inclusive participation should be prioritised to enhance legitimacy and trust among community members.

Keywords: Local Peace Committees, Communal Violence, Conflict Prevention, Social Cohesion, Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Communal violence remains a stubborn and recurring disruption to social order, manifesting in cycles of distrust, retaliation, and fragile ceasefires that seldom endure. The persistence of such violence signals a deeper institutional and relational deficit: communities lack sufficiently resilient mechanisms to anticipate, manage, and transform conflict before it escalates into open hostility. In many localities, particularly within subnational contexts such as Osun State, Nigeria, the absence or inadequacy of effective grassroots peace infrastructures allows minor disputes, over land boundaries, chieftaincy titles, or resource allocation, to spiral

into violent confrontations. The problem, therefore, is not merely the occurrence of communal violence but the insufficiency of locally embedded mechanisms capable of preventing its emergence, de-escalating tensions, and sustaining peace over time. This gap raises a pressing intellectual and practical concern: to what extent can locally constituted peace architectures, specifically local peace committees, function as viable instruments for preventing communal violence in contexts characterised by historical grievances and socio-political complexity?

Communal violence, within the context of this study, refers to organised or spontaneous acts of aggression between identity-based groups residing within the same geographical locality, often rooted in perceived incompatibilities over resources, power, or cultural legitimacy. It is not simply violence between individuals; it is violence that carries the weight of collective identity, where the injury of one is interpreted as the injury of all. Contemporary scholarship conceptualises communal violence as both a symptom and a driver of weak social cohesion, fragile governance structures, and limited conflict resolution capacity (Ide, 2021; von Uexkull & Pettersson, 2023). In practical terms, it resembles a smouldering fire beneath dry grass, often invisible until a spark ignites widespread destruction. Its consequences extend beyond immediate physical harm to include economic stagnation, displacement, erosion of trust, and long-term developmental setbacks.

Preventing communal violence, therefore, entails a proactive and sustained effort to address the structural, relational, and proximate drivers of conflict before they escalate into violence. Prevention is not merely the absence of war; it is the presence of systems that detect early warning signs, facilitate dialogue, and build trust among conflicting parties. Scholars increasingly emphasise that effective prevention operates at the intersection of formal governance and informal social institutions, where legitimacy, accessibility, and cultural resonance converge (OECD, 2021; United Nations, 2022). In this regard, prevention can be likened to a well-tuned early warning system, sensitive enough to detect tension, yet robust enough to mobilise timely and appropriate responses.

Local peace committees emerge within this discourse as community-based platforms designed to mediate disputes, foster dialogue, and promote reconciliation. These committees typically comprise respected community members, traditional leaders, religious figures, and civil society representatives who possess both contextual knowledge and social legitimacy. Within the framework of this study, local peace committees are understood as institutionalised yet flexible mechanisms that operate at the grassroots level to manage and transform conflict dynamics. They function not as external arbiters but as embedded actors within the social fabric, capable of navigating the nuanced terrain of local relationships and histories. Their role has been likened in the literature to that of "social shock absorbers," cushioning communities against the impact of emerging tensions and preventing escalation into violence (Odendaal, 2021).

Effectiveness, as conceptualised in this study, refers to the degree to which local peace committees achieve their intended outcomes of preventing communal violence, fostering social cohesion, and sustaining peaceful coexistence. It encompasses both process and outcome dimensions: the ability to facilitate inclusive dialogue, the timeliness of interventions, the durability of peace agreements, and the perceived legitimacy of the committee's actions. Effectiveness is not a static attribute but a dynamic interplay of capacity,

context, and credibility. It raises critical evaluative questions: Do these committees merely respond to crises, or do they actively prevent them? Are their interventions perceived as impartial and just? Do they address root causes or merely suppress symptoms?

The theoretical grounding of this study draws from Peacebuilding Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory, each offering a lens through which the role of local peace committees can be understood. Peacebuilding Theory underscores the importance of local ownership and inclusive processes in sustaining peace, arguing that externally imposed solutions often lack legitimacy and durability (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2020). Within this framework, local peace committees represent a shift from top-down interventions to bottom-up peace architectures, where communities are not passive recipients but active agents of peace.

Social Capital Theory provides further insight into the mechanisms through which local peace committees operate. It posits that networks of trust, norms of reciprocity, and shared values constitute valuable resources that facilitate collective action (Putnam et al., 2021). In communities where social capital is strong, conflicts are more likely to be resolved through dialogue and mutual understanding rather than violence. Local peace committees, by fostering interactions and building trust across group boundaries, effectively "weave the social fabric" that holds communities together. However, where social capital is fragmented or exclusionary, these committees may struggle to gain legitimacy or achieve meaningful impact.

Conflict Transformation Theory, as articulated in contemporary scholarship, shifts the focus from resolving discrete conflicts to transforming the underlying relationships, structures, and narratives that sustain them (Lederach, 2022). From this perspective, local peace committees are not merely problem-solvers but agents of social change, tasked with addressing historical grievances, power imbalances, and entrenched mistrust. Their effectiveness, therefore, hinges on their ability to move beyond surface-level mediation to deeper processes of reconciliation and structural reform.

Empirical studies within the past five years provide mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of local peace committees. In some contexts, such as Kenya and South Africa, these committees have demonstrated notable success in reducing violence and enhancing community resilience (Odendaal, 2021; Wanyama & McGlinchey, 2022). They have been credited with improving early warning systems, facilitating dialogue, and strengthening local governance structures. However, other studies highlight significant challenges, including limited resources, political interference, lack of formal recognition, and issues of representativeness (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2022; Okafor & Okeke, 2023). These challenges raise important questions about scalability, sustainability, and contextual adaptability.

In the Nigerian context, communal violence remains a recurrent issue across various states, driven by a complex interplay of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic factors. While much of the literature has focused on high-intensity conflicts in regions such as the North-East and Middle Belt, less attention has been paid to the dynamics of communal violence in South-Western states like Osun. Yet, Osun State is not immune to such tensions, with periodic disputes over land ownership, traditional authority, and political representation. These

conflicts, though often localised, carry the potential for escalation and broader destabilisation if not effectively managed.

Local peace committees in Osun State operate within a unique socio-cultural and institutional environment characterised by strong traditional institutions, active civil society, and evolving governance structures. This context presents both opportunities and constraints for their effectiveness. On one hand, the presence of respected traditional and religious leaders can enhance legitimacy and facilitate community buy-in. On the other hand, overlapping authorities and political interests may complicate decision-making processes and undermine neutrality. The question, then, is not simply whether local peace committees exist, but whether they function effectively within this specific context.

At this juncture, it is worth pausing to ask a few uncomfortable but necessary questions. If local peace committees are indeed the "first responders" to communal tensions, why do some conflicts still escalate into violence despite their presence? Are these committees adequately equipped, both in terms of skills and resources, to handle the complexities of modern conflict dynamics? To what extent do they engage with marginalised groups, whose exclusion often fuels grievances? And perhaps most critically, how do we measure their effectiveness in a way that captures both immediate outcomes and long-term impacts?

These questions are not merely academic; they strike at the heart of policy and practice. Understanding the effectiveness of local peace committees has implications for conflict prevention strategies, resource allocation, and institutional design. It informs whether investments should be directed towards strengthening existing committees, reforming their structures, or exploring alternative mechanisms. In a broader sense, it contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of local versus external actors in peacebuilding, a debate that continues to shape interventions across conflict-affected regions.

The significance of focusing on effectiveness cannot be overstated. In the absence of rigorous evaluation, there is a risk of romanticising local peace initiatives without critically examining their impact. Effectiveness serves as a reality check, grounding theoretical optimism in empirical evidence. It forces us to confront the gap between intention and outcome, between design and practice. In doing so, it enables a more nuanced understanding of what works, what does not, and why.

Analogously, local peace committees can be compared to community health workers in a public health system. Just as the latter play a crucial role in preventing disease outbreaks through early detection and intervention, the former are expected to prevent conflict outbreaks through dialogue and mediation. However, the effectiveness of community health workers depends on training, support, and integration into the broader health system. Similarly, the effectiveness of local peace committees depends on capacity building, institutional support, and alignment with formal governance structures. Without these, they risk becoming symbolic rather than functional.

In the light of the foregoing, this study is situated at the intersection of theory, practice, and context. It seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts of local peace committees to a more analytical examination of their effectiveness in preventing communal violence in Osun State,

Nigeria. By grounding the analysis in contemporary theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the study aims to provide a robust and context-sensitive understanding of the role of these committees. It also seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on conflict prevention by offering insights that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

Ultimately, the study is driven by a simple yet profound concern: how can communities live together without fear of violence? Local peace committees represent one possible answer, but their effectiveness cannot be assumed, it must be critically examined. This study, therefore, embarks on that examination, guided by the conviction that sustainable peace is not an abstract ideal but a practical necessity, one that requires deliberate, informed, and contextually grounded action.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the proliferation of community-based peace architectures across Nigeria, communal violence continues to manifest in cycles of tension, confrontation, and fragile reconciliation, suggesting that existing preventive structures may be inadequate or inconsistently effective. The persistence of such violence raises concerns about the functional capacity, legitimacy, and operational efficiency of local peace committees in managing conflict dynamics within complex socio-cultural environments such as Osun State.

Empirical evidence indicates that while local peace committees have the potential to facilitate early warning, dialogue, and mediation, their impact is often constrained by limited resources, weak institutional integration, and issues of representativeness (Odendaal, 2021; Aning & Edu-Afful, 2022). Furthermore, questions persist regarding whether these committees merely respond to crises or actively prevent escalation through proactive engagement and trust-building. The absence of rigorous, context-specific evaluation frameworks has further obscured understanding of their true effectiveness (Wanyama & McGlinchey, 2022; Okafor & Okeke, 2023).

Consequently, there exists a significant knowledge gap concerning the extent to which local peace committees contribute to sustainable peace outcomes in subnational contexts. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on their effectiveness in preventing communal violence in Osun State, thereby informing policy, practice, and scholarly discourse.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of local peace committees in preventing communal violence in Osun State, Nigeria, with a view to generating empirical insights that can strengthen grassroots peacebuilding mechanisms and inform policy interventions.

Specificifally, the study sought to:

i. assess the extent to which local peace committees facilitate early warning and conflict prevention in Osun State;
ii. evaluate the role of local peace committees in promoting dialogue and social cohesion among conflicting groups and
iii. determine the influence of local peace committees on the sustainability of peace and reduction of communal violence.

Hypotheses

H_{01}: Local peace committees do not significantly facilitate early warning and conflict prevention in Osun State.

H_{02}: Local peace committees do not significantly promote dialogue and social cohesion among conflicting groups.

H_{03}: Local peace committees do not significantly influence the sustainability of peace and reduction of communal violence.

Literature Review

This study is anchored on Conflict Transformation Theory, which provides a robust analytical lens for understanding the role of local peace committees in preventing communal violence. The theory posits that sustainable peace requires more than the resolution of immediate disputes; it demands a transformation of underlying relationships, structures, and narratives that perpetuate conflict (Lederach, 2022). Within this framework, local peace committees function as embedded agents of change, facilitating dialogue, rebuilding trust, and addressing historical grievances at the grassroots level.

Recent scholarship underscores the growing relevance of community-based mechanisms in conflict prevention. Odendaal (2021) argues that local peace infrastructures enhance early warning capabilities and enable timely intervention before conflicts escalate. Similarly, Wanyama and McGlinchey (2022) highlight that inclusive dialogue platforms strengthen social cohesion and reduce the likelihood of violent confrontation. These findings align with the theoretical assumption that proximity, legitimacy, and contextual knowledge enhance the effectiveness of local actors in peacebuilding processes.

However, the literature also reveals significant limitations. Aning and Edu-Afful (2022) observe that local peace committees often operate under resource constraints and are vulnerable to political interference, which undermines their neutrality and effectiveness. Okafor and Okeke (2023) further note that issues of exclusion and weak institutional support can limit their capacity to address deep-seated structural drivers of conflict. These challenges suggest that effectiveness is contingent upon both internal capacity and external support systems.

The relevance of this study lies in its focus on Osun State, a context that has received limited scholarly attention despite its susceptibility to communal tensions. By empirically evaluating the effectiveness of local peace committees within this setting, the study contributes to the refinement of Conflict Transformation Theory and offers context-specific insights that can inform policy and practice in similar environments.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the effectiveness of local peace committees in preventing communal violence in Osun State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate as it enabled the testing of relationships between defined variables and the validation of the stated hypotheses using statistical techniques.

The target population comprised community leaders, members of local peace committees, traditional rulers, and civil society representatives across selected local government areas in Osun State. A sample size of 300 respondents was determined using a stratified and simple random sampling technique to ensure representativeness across different communities.

Data were collected using a self-designed structured questionnaire titled *Effectiveness of Local Peace Committees in Preventing Communal Violence Questionnaire (ELPCPCVQ)*. The instrument was structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. A pilot study was conducted among 30 respondents in a neighbouring state to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83 confirmed a high level of internal consistency.

Data collection was carried out through direct administration of questionnaires with the assistance of trained research assistants. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed.

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarise the data, while inferential statistics, specifically multiple regression analysis, were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for all analyses.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	60.7
	Female	118	39.3
Age	18–30 years	64	21.3
	31–45 years	128	42.7
	46 years and above	108	36.0
Role	Community Leaders	96	32.0
	Peace Committee Members	84	28.0
	Traditional Rulers	60	20.0
	Civil Society Representatives	60	20.0
Education	Secondary	72	24.0
	Tertiary	228	76.0

Source: Field Report, 2026

The demographic distribution indicates a balanced and knowledgeable respondent base suitable for assessing local peace committee effectiveness. The dominance of males (60.7%) reflects traditional leadership structures in Osun State, while female participation (39.3%) remains significant for inclusive perspectives. The age structure is skewed towards mature respondents (78.7% above 30 years), suggesting experiential insight into communal conflict dynamics. Role distribution shows adequate representation across stakeholders, particularly community leaders and committee members who are directly involved in peace processes.

The high proportion of tertiary-educated respondents (76.0%) enhances the credibility of responses, indicating that findings are derived from informed and contextually aware participants.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: Local peace committees do not significantly facilitate early warning and conflict prevention.

Table 2: Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Committees identify early signs of conflict	132	96	48	24	3.12
Timely intervention prevents escalation	128	104	44	24	3.12
Information sharing enhances preparedness	120	110	50	20	3.10
Monitoring mechanisms are effective	118	102	56	24	3.05
Rapid response reduces violence	130	100	46	24	3.12

Grand Mean = 3.10

Decision Rule: Accept H_0 if mean < 2.50; Reject H_0 if mean ≥ 2.50

Decision: H_{01} Rejected

Source: Field Report, 2026

The results demonstrate strong agreement that local peace committees effectively facilitate early warning and conflict prevention. All items recorded mean scores above 3.00, indicating that respondents perceive these committees as proactive in identifying and managing emerging tensions. The consistency across items suggests operational reliability in monitoring, information sharing, and rapid response mechanisms. The high grand mean (3.10) confirms that early intervention strategies are both functional and impactful in preventing escalation. This implies that local peace committees are not merely reactive bodies but actively contribute to pre-emptive conflict management, thereby reducing the likelihood of communal violence within the studied communities.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Local peace committees do not significantly promote dialogue and social cohesion.

Table 3: Dialogue and Social Cohesion

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Committees encourage inclusive dialogue	126	108	42	24	3.12
Mediation improves relationships	120	112	44	24	3.09
Trust is strengthened among groups	118	110	48	24	3.07
Community participation is enhanced	122	104	50	24	3.08
Inter-group cooperation increases	124	106	46	24	3.10

Grand Mean = 3.09

Decision Rule: Accept H_0 if mean < 2.50; Reject H_0 if mean ≥ 2.50

Decision: H_{02} Rejected

Source: Field Report, 2026

Findings indicate that local peace committees significantly promote dialogue and social cohesion. The high mean scores across all items reflect strong respondent agreement that these committees facilitate inclusive engagement and relationship-building among conflicting groups. The results suggest that mediation processes have contributed to rebuilding trust and enhancing cooperation within communities. The grand mean of 3.09 reinforces the perception that local peace committees serve as effective platforms for interaction and reconciliation. This underscores their role in addressing relational dimensions of conflict, which are critical for sustainable peace, particularly in environments characterised by historical mistrust and identity-based divisions.

Hypothesis Three

H_{03}: Local peace committees do not significantly influence sustainable peace and reduction of communal violence.

Table 4: Sustainability of Peace and Reduction of Violence

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Peace agreements are sustained	120	110	46	24	3.09
Recurrence of violence is reduced	118	112	46	24	3.08
Long-term peace strategies are effective	116	108	52	24	3.05
Community resilience is strengthened	122	104	50	24	3.08
Stability is maintained over time	124	106	46	24	3.10

Grand Mean = 3.08

Decision Rule: Accept H_0 if mean < 2.50; Reject H_0 if mean ≥ 2.50

Decision: H_{03} Rejected

Source: Field Report, 2026

The findings reveal that local peace committees significantly influence the sustainability of peace and reduction of communal violence. Mean scores above 3.00 across all indicators confirm that respondents perceive these committees as instrumental in maintaining stability and preventing relapse into conflict. The results suggest that interventions extend beyond immediate dispute resolution to long-term peace consolidation. The grand mean of 3.08 indicates consistent effectiveness in strengthening community resilience and sustaining agreements. This demonstrates that local peace committees contribute meaningfully to durable peace outcomes, reinforcing their relevance as grassroots mechanisms for conflict prevention and management.

Discussion of Findings

The rejection of H_{01} indicates that local peace committees significantly facilitate early warning and conflict prevention. This finding aligns with Odendaal (2021), who emphasised that local peace infrastructures enhance early detection of conflict signals and enable timely intervention. Similarly, Wanyama and McGlinchey (2022) found that community-based mechanisms improve responsiveness to emerging tensions through local intelligence and trust networks. The high mean scores in this study confirm that such mechanisms are operational and effective in Osun State. However, the finding contradicts Aning and Edu-Afful (2022), who argued that resource limitations often hinder early warning capabilities in African contexts. The divergence may be attributed to the relatively strong traditional

structures in Osun State, which enhance information flow and responsiveness. Overall, the findings suggest that when adequately supported, local peace committees can function as efficient early warning systems, significantly reducing the risk of escalation into communal violence.

The rejection of H_{02} demonstrates that local peace committees significantly promote dialogue and social cohesion. This supports Lederach (2022), who posited that sustainable peace emerges through inclusive dialogue and relationship transformation. Additionally, Wanyama and McGlinchey (2022) observed that grassroots peace platforms strengthen trust and cooperation among conflicting groups. The strong agreement reflected in the data indicates that local peace committees in Osun State effectively facilitate interaction and reconciliation. However, the findings contrast with Okafor and Okeke (2023), who reported that exclusion and weak participation often limit the effectiveness of such committees in Nigeria. The discrepancy may be explained by contextual variations in committee composition and legitimacy. In this study, the involvement of respected community actors likely enhanced inclusiveness and trust. Consequently, the findings reinforce the argument that dialogue-driven interventions are central to fostering social cohesion and preventing identity-based conflicts.

The rejection of H_{03} indicates that local peace committees significantly influence sustainable peace and the reduction of communal violence. This aligns with Odendaal (2021), who highlighted that local peace structures contribute to long-term stability by embedding peace practices within communities. Similarly, Lederach (2022) emphasised that transforming relationships and addressing root causes leads to durable peace outcomes. The empirical data in this study confirm that local peace committees play a vital role in sustaining agreements and strengthening resilience. However, the finding contradicts Okafor and Okeke (2023), who argued that many committees fail to achieve long-term impact due to weak institutional support. The contrast suggests that effectiveness is context-dependent, with Osun State benefiting from relatively cohesive social structures. The findings imply that when local peace committees are functional and legitimate, they can significantly reduce the recurrence of violence and contribute to enduring peace.

Conclusion

This study established that local peace committees play a significant and measurable role in preventing communal violence in Osun State, Nigeria. The findings across the three hypotheses consistently demonstrated that these committees are not merely symbolic structures but functional mechanisms embedded within community systems. Specifically, the study revealed that local peace committees effectively facilitate early warning and conflict prevention, as evidenced by a grand mean of 3.10, indicating strong agreement among respondents regarding their proactive engagement in identifying and mitigating emerging tensions.

Furthermore, the study confirmed that local peace committees significantly promote dialogue and social cohesion, with a grand mean of 3.09. This underscores their capacity to rebuild trust, foster inclusiveness, and enhance cooperation among conflicting groups. In addition, the findings showed that local peace committees significantly influence the sustainability of

peace and reduction of communal violence, with a grand mean of 3.08, reflecting their contribution to long-term stability and community resilience.

Overall, the study concludes that the effectiveness of local peace committees is contingent upon their legitimacy, operational capacity, and integration within local governance structures. When adequately supported, these committees serve as critical instruments for conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding in complex socio-cultural environments.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the practical relevance of strengthening local peace committees as grassroots mechanisms for preventing communal violence. To enhance their effectiveness and sustainability, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Government and relevant stakeholders should provide structured capacity-building programmes to enhance the technical and mediation skills of local peace committee members.
2. Adequate funding and logistical support should be allocated to local peace committees to improve their responsiveness and operational efficiency.
3. Mechanisms should be established to ensure inclusiveness and representation of marginalised groups in peace committee structures.
4. Strong institutional linkages should be developed between local peace committees and formal governance systems to enhance coordination and legitimacy.
5. Continuous monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be implemented to assess performance and improve accountability in peacebuilding interventions.

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