

# Peacebuilding in Volatile Communities



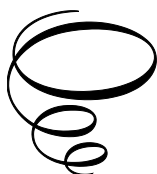
# Peacebuilding in Volatile Communities:

## *Nigerian Experiences*

Edited by

Joseph Olusegun Adebayo  
and Olawale James Gbadeyan

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Peacebuilding in Volatile Communities: Nigerian Experiences

Edited by Joseph Olusegun Adebayo and Olawale James Gbadeyan

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## INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH OLUSEGUN ADEBAYO  
AND OLAWALE GBADEYAN

Nigeria, one of Africa's most volatile nations, always tilts towards conflict since the Northern and Southern Protector's amalgamation in 1914 by the then Governor-General, Lord Lugard. The intractable conflicts have constantly threatened Nigeria's corporate existence. As a result, many have regarded the amalgamation as the 'mistake of 1914' because it somewhat fused ethnically and religiously diverse nationalities into a single federation. The country, it seemed, was set up to fail from the beginning.

Signs of a faulty federation were visible even during negotiations for independence from Britain. <sup>1</sup>The then Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello, had called for the postponement of agitations for freedom until the sub-national federations agreed on the 'structure' of the new nation, vis-à-vis how the ethnic nationalities and federating units would share power and resources. Sir Ahmadu Bello and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), leading nationalists in the struggle for independence, had divergent views regarding post-independence Nigeria's socio-politically outlook. While Zik favoured a more centrist political architecture, Bello favoured a looser federation that guaranteed the preservation of the dominant Islamic religious culture of the behemoth Northern region. At the peak of agitation for independence, Bello told Zik:

24 "No, let us (first) understand our differences; I am a Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian and an Easterner. By understanding our differences, we can build unity in our country."

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<sup>1</sup> Adebani, W. 2007. Clashing Cymbals: The Nigerian Press and the Narratives of the National Question. In *The Management of the National Question in Nigeria*, edited by E. E. Osaghae and E. Onwuddiwe, 142–146. Okada: Igbinedion University Press

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1.

Shortly after independence, the nation plunged into a 30-month civil war that killed an estimated two million people and internally displaced several million. Since the unfortunate civil war, Nigeria has grappled with decades of draconian military rule and agitations for sovereign control by some regions that make up present-day Nigeria.

Shortly after the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria faced ethnoreligious tensions resulting from the planned implementation of the Sharia legal system in some northern states.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars aver that the Sharia crisis presented a veritable platform for the Boko Haram insurgency to grow and expand alongside other drivers like local politics, intra-Muslim rivalries, socioeconomic factors, and police/military brutality in response to the Boko Haram group's activities.

There have been peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria since the Civil War of the 1960s. However, there seems to have been an increase in peacebuilding activities since the return to democracy in 1999. Consequently, this book interrogates and examines peacebuilding in selected communities in Nigeria. The contributors to this volume analyse different perspectives of peacebuilding in Nigeria, considering Nigeria's unique sociocultural and sociopolitical milieus.

In *Chapter 1*, Joseph Adebayo examines the potential of participatory action research approach to peace journalism training on journalists' reportage of conflict-sensitive social issues like elections. The study stems from field research conducted in Nigeria's restive Northcentral region during the 2015 general elections and given the often-turbulent nature of elections in Nigeria and considering Nigeria's propensity to ethnoreligious violence, especially during election periods. The study presents findings of the researcher's actionable steps to conduct participatory action research in a volatile and suspicious milieu like Nigeria. This study holds theoretical significance because it explicitly identifies conditions that encourage a conflict-sensitive action research approach. It also provides practical steps towards conducting community-focused participatory action research, particularly in volatile socio-political milieus like Nigeria.

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<sup>3</sup> Thurston, A. 2016. 'The disease is unbelief': Boko Haram's religious and political worldview. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper | No. 22, January 2016

In *Chapter 2*, Omoshola, Ismail and Zakuan explore the trajectories of conflict in Ogoniland and evaluates past efforts at restoring Peace amongst aggrieved and conflicting communities. The researchers propose a workable peacebuilding process involving Shell Petroleum, the Nigerian government, and the Ogoni people. They also presented recommendations stemming from their on-field peacebuilding initiatives in Ogoniland.

In *Chapter 3*, Olubunmi Akande examines the patterns of violent conflict in two communities involved in a series of violent confrontations over the ownership of specific portions of land adjoining the two communities. First, the chapter analyses the conflict's primary drivers and intractable character. Next, the chapter explores a local intervention implemented to stimulate attitudinal change and disrupt degenerative segregation patterns and acquaintances. Knowledge advancement and friendship were two significant outcomes of the interactive meetings, reaffirming popular notions on contact interventions' impacts. On the other hand, emerging developments in the study context brought to the forefront the realities of the limitations of micro-level interventions on the structural underpinnings of conflict.

Adeseghan Damian and Adegboyega Ola explore the extent to which non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play vital roles in conflict management in *Chapter 4*. The chapter examines the activities of the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) in Ondo in conflict management through the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods in Ondo state, Nigeria. The researchers examine the nature of challenges and outcomes of interpersonal, communal, family, and litigation cases handled by JDPC from 2008 to 2017. The chapter further assesses the reform of the criminal administration system, thereby engendering the peaceful coexistence of the people of Ondo State.

In *Chapter 5*, Abubakar Mohammed addresses the pervasive armed banditry and its associated threats to human security in the Northwest region of Nigeria, particularly the Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto states. It confronts the challenges armed banditry poses to national security and public safety. Finally, the chapter argues for applying the principles of dialogue and negotiation in resolving the menace of banditry, especially in Northwest Nigeria.

Daniel Nosakhare, in **Chapter 6**, unpacks the process of peacebuilding in the relationship between the host community of Arepo and the commercial motorcycle taxis or ‘Okada riders’ who are predominantly Hausa-Fulani from northern Nigeria. The chapter focuses on the tensions and continuous unrest that has marked relations between non-indigenous Hausa-Fulani people and the Yoruba host communities in settlements such as Magodo, Ikeja, and other communities in and around Lagos State, Nigeria. The chapter also explores how community stakeholders have fashioned out ‘homegrown’ peacebuilding initiatives to encourage peaceful coexistence.

In **Chapter 7**, Joseph Adebayo and Irene Oseremen Felix examine the potential peace club infrastructures in public secondary schools in peacebuilding. The chapter argues that Whilst the problem of school-based violence is not new to many societies in the world, what is becoming evident is the increasingly severe nature of the violence taking place within such context. Direct violence in many schools and communities has become alarming, and the response has been violent. The chapter, which stems from Participatory Action Research conducted in selected schools in Nigeria, put forward an alternative to the use of force by the police and other paramilitary organisations to quell school violence—setting up school-based peace clubs. The chapter examines the impact of peace clubs on the selected schools and how these structures can play vital roles in stemming school and societal violence.

In **Chapter 8**, Abel Idebe explores new approaches for Peace and security in terrorised spaces, focusing on Birnin Gwari Community Theatre for Development Project. Theatre for Development (TFD) has proven to be a veritable tool for engaging divergent communities, especially in health education, political and voter’s education, agricultural and extension works, youth and women education, and other community advocacy needs. The chapter explores new possibilities and approaches in exploring TFD to empower community actors in providing much-needed Peace and security in their terrorised areas. The chapter examines explicitly the TFD project undertaken in the Birnin Gwari community of Kaduna State, Northwest Nigeria. It provides a background to the challenges affecting the community and how they have informed the use of TFD for empowering community actors to ensure active participation in the Peace and security of their community.

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# THE CASE FOR A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH TO JOURNALISM TRAINING: A NIGERIAN STUDY

JOSEPH OLUSEGUN ADEBAYO  
AND HERMON OGBAMICHAEL

## **Introduction**

In March 2015, Nigeria conducted one of its history's most tenuous general elections. In the weeks and months leading up to the general elections, the intense rivalry between President Goodluck Jonathan and his main rival, Muhammadu Buhari, rapidly descended from a contest based solely on socio-political ideologies to ethnic political ideologies and religious contestations. Nigeria's elections have always been turbulent since the nation's botched First Republic shortly after independence, and the country's media has always played important roles. For example, shortly after attaining independence from Britain in 1960, the media, which played an important role in sensitising and mobilising the people during the struggle for emancipation, became a tool for ethnic and religious bigotry in the hands of their regional owners. Abati (2006, 22) avers that the media expanded Nigeria's existing national fault lines through sectional and sensational reportage rather than fostering Peace and national integration.

Predictably, barely six years after independence, Nigeria plunged into political anarchy partly caused by the disputed general elections during the First Republic and fuelled mainly by sectional and sensational reportage from the country's regional media outfits (Abati, 2006). According to Olayiwola (1991, 36), during Nigeria's First Republic from 1959 to 1966, there were mixed-party and non-party media, government-owned and controlled press, political-party newspapers and the press of private

concerns. The ownership of these media organisations was reflected mainly in their coverage of national issues of paramount importance, such as the census, election campaigns, regional crises, and ethnic and group interests, among others. The leading political party newspapers were locked in combat and provided remarkable examples of over-zealous, irresponsible partisanship and recklessness. The central debate between the North and the South in Nigeria has always been whether the media, primarily based and owned in the South, could be fair and objective in dealing with matters outside its region.

The stakes in the 2015 elections were higher than in previous elections for many reasons, chief amongst them being the ongoing war against insurgency in the country's Northeast. In addition, the country split along ethnic and religious lines, similar only to the scenarios that led to the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s. In the months leading up to the general elections, there were blame games, accusations and counter-accusations between Nigeria's main ethnic groups. Expectedly, the media once again played a significant role in setting the agenda for public discourse. Realising the impact of media reportage on (non)violent elections, the researcher undertook a participatory action research study that examined the potential of a peace journalism approach to reportage to stem political violence and foster Peace, especially during elections.

### **Nigeria's Socio-Political Milieu: the Polemics**

Nigeria has had a turbulent experience determining the mode of cohabitation collectively, how power should be organised and contested, and what end power should serve. The contestation has also been about an equitable and fair share of national resources and access to state power by all ethnic nationalities, irrespective of size and strength, which exist under shared political sovereignty. Unfortunately, failing to articulate a shared position on nearly all these critical issues has been the bane of Nigeria's march to nationhood.

Perhaps it explains why the conflict has become an enduring characteristic of the Nigerian federation. It has given rise to an age-long discourse on what has been severally regarded as the 'national question.' Adebani (2007) argues that from the time of the French Revolution, the idea of the national question has been based on the grand consensus entered into by a political community within which there are separate identities. He further posited that the significant agreement defines those fundamental issues the

association or union is constructed. Thus, one can safely put forward that the national question centres on how the nation is constituted, particularly in post-colonial polities. It also focuses on the fundamental workings of such a formed state, the nature of the union, the pattern of its unity, integrity, autonomy and viability as a distinct and prosperous entity.

Addressing the issue of the national question in Nigeria, Labinjoh (2007) gives a rather critical view of the roles played by the founding fathers of independent Nigeria. He argues that those generally acknowledged as at the forefront of Nigerian nationalism were Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello. These men are national heroes. They deserve that accolade on the strength of their struggle to emancipate a segment of the African continent from European domination. However, Labinjoh (2007) believes that their struggles to be a historical reality called Nigeria may be evaluated by history differently. According to Labinjoh, that struggle may be judged a heroic disaster of monumental proportions. These men took for granted the geopolitical entity that Lugard created. They accepted it as a given, i.e., a natural entity worthy of defending. It never occurred to them that this 'artificial creation might have dissonance or incongruence built into it.

Indications that independence from the British colonialists would only expose the deficiencies that already existed between and amongst the various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria emerged during the struggle for freedom by the nationalists. As Agbese (2008) opines, the road to Nigeria's independence was fraught with internal problems, as the regions suspected one another's motive for demanding freedom from Britain. The regional leaders could not agree on the country's independence date. They haggled over it at the constitutional conferences with the British colonial authorities. The Eastern and Western regions pressed for a date in 1956. The Northern Region, however, opposed the motion.

Chief Anthony Enahoro is famous for moving the motion for independence in 1953. Sir Ahmadu constructed it differently. He said it was not Enahoro's but Action Group's motion that stood in Enahoro's name as a private member's motion. The North had no prior knowledge of this significant political development. During the budget session of 1953, the northerners were shocked to find a private member's motion put down which read '*that this house accepts as primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956*' (Agbese, 2008). The North refused to support the motion.

Its leaders felt that a rush into self-governing for the region or even independence for the country was ill-advised. Yahaya Gusau, a member of the House Representatives, took this a step further when he retorted:

The British government will fail in its duty if it gives self-government to Nigeria...at a time when the north is still incapable of taking its total share in the educational, economic, political and administrative activities in the country and at a time when the commoner in the north does not know his right, much less how to ask for them.'

The north then moved a dilatory counter-motion to defeat Enahoro's motion. According to Agbese (2008), the North and the South stoked the fire of mutual discontent. Their leaders made provocative statements without sparing some thought for political or social consequences. For example, Charles Daddy Onyeama, the first Nigerian justice of the International Court at The Hague, was a member of the Legislative Council. On 17 June 1948, he predicted that "Igbo domination of Nigeria was only a matter of time". The Yoruba instantly saw dangers ahead. In response to this provocative statement, the newly formed *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* infiltrated many trade unions and sought to remove their Igbo officeholders.

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was generally regarded as a calm politician. Still, he too could not resist the urge to make a careless and provocative statement in the Legislative Council on 24 March 1947, where he retorted thus: *"I should like to make it clear to you that if the British quitted Nigeria now at this stage; the Northern people would continue their uninterrupted conquest to the sea"*. Tafawa Balewa's threatened 'conquest to the sea' has been dubbed by many as one of the significant pointers that the original intent of Nigeria's Northern Muslims is the *Islamization* of Nigeria. Proponents of the Sovereign National Conference have severally referred to the statement credited to Balewa as one of the main reasons we need to address the national question vis-à-vis the question of religious harmony amongst Nigeria's leading religions-Islam and Christianity (Animashawun, 2012).

Animashawun (2012) infers that religious conflicts, especially inter-religious ones, have manifested in varying degrees since the 1914 amalgamation of present-day Nigeria's Northern and Southern Protectorates. It reflects global trends in the often conflictive relationship between religion and politics. He argues that religious conflicts have been classified into religious fundamentalism in the contemporary world. Religious terrorism is predominant in failed states like Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, and tension arises from the clash of civilisations. Religious

fundamentalists are united by specific characteristics such as a perception of being under threat, which makes them adopt strategies to preserve their identities and ideologies in response to actual or imagined attacks from non-believers, whom they assume are hell-bent on luring them into a syncretistic, irreligious cultural milieu.

As Obadare and Adebani (2010) assert, Nigeria has experimented with all sorts of political systems and ideologies in the struggle to create a more just, more equitable and more democratic polity than was inherited from the British economic policies and even cultural paradigms. Under the leadership and political elite that is deficient in many respects, Nigeria has fought a Civil War to save and transcend 'the mistake of 1914', survived several serial bloodletting in the attempts to understand religious, ethnic and regional differences and emerged from several years of brutal, even homicidal, military rule. However, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, ethnicity and the national question have become a recurring factor in Nigeria's politicking and a significant threat to state survival. This is even more prevalent during elections.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Peace Journalism Model**

As stated in the introductory section of this study, the Nigerian media has consistently played an active role in Nigeria's democratic process. Given Nigeria's diversity, it is often easy to interlace media messages wittingly or unwittingly with ethnoreligious biases; media-instigated conflicts are common occurrences. For example, Salawu (2013, 44) recounts that the 2002 Miss World Pageant in Nigeria was violently disrupted, owing to a media report that pitched Christians against Muslims in Nigeria's northwestern state of Kaduna. A style writer with *Thisday Newspaper*, one of Nigeria's leading dailies, had written a feature article published on 16 November 2002 in which she stated that:

"The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring 92 women to Nigeria to ask them to revel in vanity. What would Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from one of them." (*Thisday Newspaper*, 16 November 2002).

Suffice it to add that there had been growing discontent, particularly amongst Nigeria's northern Muslims, against the planned pageant before the article. Expectedly, given the already tense Muslim-Christian relations in Northern Nigeria at that period, the story did not go well with Muslims who accused the newspaper of deliberately denigrating the person of Prophet

Mohammed and Islam in general. Hence, they resorted to violent attacks on Christians and churches, killing, maiming and burning.

One of the researcher's objectives was to determine the impact training of selected journalists on a peace journalism approach to the reporting of elections would have on the 'success or otherwise of the election, especially on societal Peace in general. However, Peace Journalism (PJ) was initially coined by renowned Austrian peace scholar Johan Galtung in the early 1970s, Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick. They popularised the model in the early 2000s. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 5) define PJ as the deliberate selection of stories and coinage of words in ways that do not limit conflict situations to only two parties involved in a tug-of-war. They argue that many actors are interested in a conflict, as a story has equally many sides. Therefore, when journalists report in ways that present society with adequate contexts, detailed backgrounds, and exhaustive information on as many actors involved in a conflict as possible, they are said to practice PJ.

Considering the immense impact media framing has on society's understanding of a social issue, Hyde-Clarke (2011, 43) posits that PJ differs from the traditional style of reportage because of its ability to frame stories in ways that provide sufficient contexts and information, which helps members of the society to respond nonviolently to conflict or conflict-sensitive issues. She also affirms that peace journalism is not only relevant in conflict situations; it can also find relevance in maintaining Peace in society by providing varied viewpoints that will help a large section of the citizenry make informed decisions about issues that concern them. Similarly, Hackett (2010, p.118) argues that shifting and expanding the sphere of conflict reportage beyond the immediate conflict environment to larger venues, thereby providing insight into possible causes, instigators and solutions, is one of the notable achievements of peace journalism.

PJ has its critics, though. Many believe the model puts too much on the shoulders of journalists. For example, Loyn (2007) contends that PJ (un)wittingly shifts journalists from their primary duty to be impartial, observant and non-participants in a conflict. Loyn argues the idea behind peace journalism is often based on an individualistic and voluntarist illusion, suggesting that journalists only need to change their attitudes and behaviour to produce coverage that will embrace the tenets of peace journalism. He further contends that there are many structural constraints, such as inadequate personnel, availability of sources, access to the scene and information in general, which shape and limit the work of journalists.

Therefore, he affirms, it would be imprudent to suggest that the conduct of peace journalism is solely a matter of individual scope.

In defence of this model, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) maintain that peace journalism is often misunderstood as 'advocating for Peace. Instead, they aver, it is a journalism model concerned with giving Peace a chance in the national and international debate by ensuring that nonviolent responses to conflict get a fair hearing. Similarly, Peleg (2007, 3) faults Loyn's position that reporters should maintain objectivity by acting as detached observers, not players in the social sphere. He remarks that it is callous, inconceivable and insensitive for journalists to remain aloof and disconnected in the face of social injustice and tyranny. He believes it is near-impossible to report on disasters such as the Rwandan genocide, the war in the DRC, and the ravaging scourge of HIV/AIDS without empathy and a distinct emotional slant.

Peleg also disagrees with Hanitzsch's (2007, 5) position that peace journalism overemphasises voluntarism and individualism, ignoring the sustaining background, organisational logic and economic pressures accompanying day-to-day journalistic duties. According to Hanitzsch, individual reporters work alongside other peace-minded people or groups to ensure Peace, as they cannot possibly work alone or in a vacuum. According to Peleg (2007, 4), peace journalism aims at individuals as agents of change, not as the solo crusaders proposed by Hanitzsch. The aim is to create a critical mass of individuals with innovative mindsets working towards adopting journalism, thereby rendering the tenets of peace journalism commonplace and not simply a fad.

## **The Action Research Approach**

Given the study's central aim to examine the impact training would have on journalists' reportage of the 2015 election in Nigeria, it became ostensible that an action research methodology would be the most suitable approach. Reason and Bradbury (2001, 1) define action research as:

'A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge to pursue worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, participation with others, the pursuit of practical solutions to pressing concerns to people, and more generally, the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, 11).

Somekh (2006, 7) sees action research as integrations of research and action in a series of elastic cycles which have to do with the collection of data about a particular topic under investigation, the analysis of such data, the planning and introduction of actionable strategies to initiate positive change because of the plan and the evaluation of those changes through the collection of more data, analysis, and interpretation. Action research is similar to qualitative research in that both are highly contextualised in the local knowledge of practitioners. However, according to Huang (2010, 94), while action research deals with practitioners, qualitative research is about practice. This critical difference often leaves the work actionable, i.e., not something practitioners can even wish to use practically.

The researcher planned to conduct a training programme for journalists on reporting elections using the peace journalism model. However, the researcher considered the need for a training programme that was not ambiguous but emanated from the journalists themselves. That is one of the cardinal characteristics of the action research approach. Participants must have a sense of 'part-ownership' of the intervention process.

### **Stages in the Intervention**

Action research cycles typically through the following phases: identifying a problem that needs intervention; collecting, organising, analysing, and interpreting data; and acting based on this information (Sax and Fisher, 2001, 72). Figure 1 below shows diagrammatically the stages involved in action research adopted by the researcher.

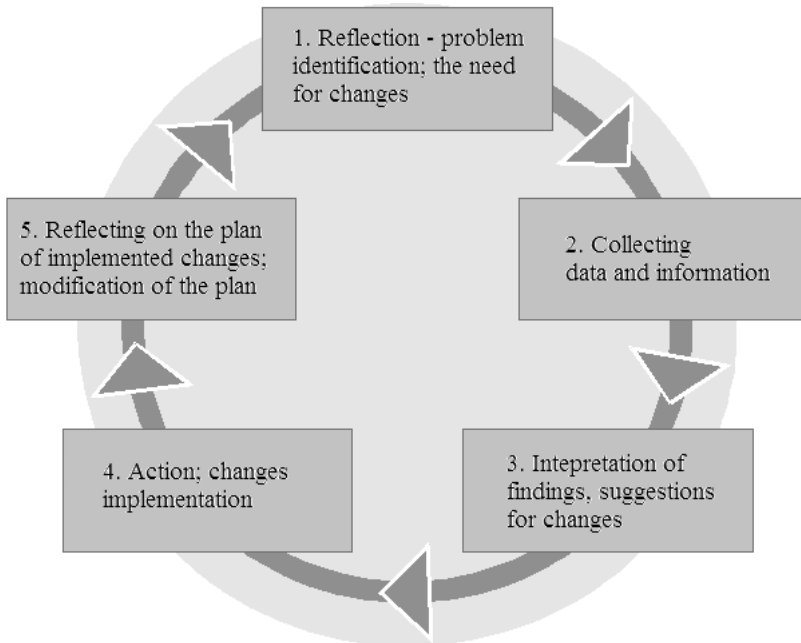


Figure 1: The action research process ([www.sitesupport.org](http://www.sitesupport.org))

### Problem Identification

Any action research's success depends on deciding the central problem the research hopes to provide intervention. Johnson (2011) states that the first step in any research study is deciding what to study. Since action research aims to effect change in each situation, it became essential to identify the required change situation. Johnson (2002, 21) believes that recognising the problem occurs when the situation is observed, acknowledging that things could be done better. In the case of the study, the researcher thought that the reportage of elections by the Nigerian media could be done better. Given that the process also involves understanding the nature of the situation and discovering the possible causal factors, the researcher examined secondary data and old bylines of selected participants to identify the problem effectively. It helped in the formulation of the research questions for the study. Some of the questions that emanated from the researcher's inquiry include: Why do journalists report the way they do? What factors influence journalists' style of reportage? Does journalistic reportage affect the outcome of elections? Etc.

## **The Problem**

The researcher was motivated to undertake the study because Nigeria's media can be divided along ethnic and religious lines. Most Nigerians view political aspirants in terms of their ethnic and religious lineage rather than political ideology. Since most Nigerians rely on the media for information, there is often the tendency to fall prey to biased and insensitive reportage capable of inciting violence. It is because most of the populace is frequently vulnerable to prejudiced information, often subtly presented as news, features, commentaries, documentaries, etc. Thus, the researcher sought to build journalists' capacity to report elections conflict-sensitively through a training programme that employed participatory action research methodology.

## **Data Gathering**

After clearly identifying the problem, the next stage is collecting data that would aid the design of an appropriate intervention. Information gathering in this research can be as simple as talking with journalists, media owners, and politicians in the research area to gauge their perceptions of the proposed research problem and possibly to probe for ideas. However, Nigeria's unique sociopolitical milieu meant it was not as easy as expected. A researcher conducting action research in a very diverse (and divided) country like Nigeria needs to be mindful of the power structures in communities and subtle ethnoreligious nuances. Moreover, given that an election was due a few months after the study, rival political parties in the community could view the study with suspicion. Therefore, to quell such scepticism, the researcher had to formally introduce himself to the community and political party leaders from all the major political parties. In addition, the researcher clarified that one of the city's halls would be used for research purposes and that journalists would converge for the study. Finally, the researcher invited key stakeholders to attend the event. These steps went a long way in ensuring that the political parties did not feel threatened by the study.

After winning the trust of the community members and major stakeholders, the researcher gathered the study's initial data. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003, 41) suggest three main categories of data collection techniques. Though their suggestions directly apply to action research in an educational setting, they had profound applicability in the study.

First, they suggest a process of observation of participants involved in the study. They state that these participants might include students, other teachers, parents, and administrators in an educational setting. They suggested that researchers use field notes or journals to record their observations and describe what has been seen and heard. Secondly, they recommend using interviews to collect relevant data for the study. Typically, discussions involve an oral exchange of questions and answers between two or more people, primarily interpersonal. However, interviews can also be conducted in a written manner by issuing questionnaires (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, 42). Thirdly, they recommend the analysis of existing records as another way of gathering data for action research. They believe it is convenient since it is often the least time-consuming since the data have already been collected. The researcher's responsibility is to make sense of what is already there. Examples of this type of data include attendance records, minutes of meetings, newspaper features, policy manuals, editorial style, etc.

The researcher followed the steps Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) recommended in gathering data for the study. The researcher underwent a process of observation of participants involved in the study. The researcher sought and obtained permission from editors of selected city media organisations to observe the news gathering and production process. The goal was to observe what journalists go through in discharging their duties and whether they face pressure to report in a particular way. The researcher also conducted interviews with editors and selected political reporters. Perhaps one of the most critical steps the researcher took for the study was the content analysis of media reportage of previous elections in Nigeria. It helped the researcher determine the areas that needed interventions and design the training manual that was eventually used.

### **Data Interpretation**

Once the data was obtained, the researcher took time to analyse the data to arrive at a reasonable conclusion that guided the research direction. During analysing data, the researcher identified the major 'story' told by the data and why the story played out in that way. Thus, analysing data helped the researcher acquire an improved understanding of the occurrence under investigation and, as a result, helped formulate the necessary interventions.

## **The Intervention**

Action research aims to act or intervene when a problem has been identified and sufficient relevant data have been obtained. Before action is taken, the researcher determines whether the data collected answers the research questions. Creswell (2005) states that to preserve the cyclical nature of action research, it is essential to monitor, evaluate and revise the process effectively during the implementation process of the action plan.

The study involved 40 political reporters and editors from Kwara State, Northcentral, Nigeria, and selected media organisations. They were purposively selected for the study because of their direct involvement in the election as political reporters. Therefore, the researcher ensured that the content of the training manual had input from the participants. To achieve this, the researcher conducted a pre-training survey. The questionnaires were administered to the participating journalists one week before the training occurred. It gave the researcher ample time to adjust before the training.

This step is crucial when conducting action research in volatile environments like Nigeria, where ethnoreligious differences are overt. A pre-training questionnaire (like in the case of the researcher's study) will go a long way in detecting possible areas of disagreement and volatility in the interventions being designed. When the participants feel like they contributed to the content of the intervention, they are less likely to be hostile to the researcher, and the intervention is more likely to have the desired positive impact.

Issues such as the facilitator's dress, women's role in the training or intervention, the food to be served to participants, the drinks, and even the venue can spark conflict if not adequately considered. Participants in an action research study are not dummies. They are people with belief systems and cultural views that must be considered by the researcher(s) in an action research study.

## **Evaluation**

When interventions are carried out in action research, it is always imperative to determine whether the interventions had any meaningful impact. Lienert (2002, 16) states that project evaluation is crucial to the action research process. It is an opportunity to 'stand back, reflect on the intervention, and

write down observations to aid the strategy. Townsend (2013, 109) remarks that evaluation is consistent with the cyclical representation action.

## Recommendations

At the end of the study, the researcher asked the participants to state specific ways they think their reportage will foster peaceful elections. Most respondents said they would apply the training on Lynch and McGoldrick's 17-point plan for practical peace journalism in their reportage. However, some salient points that stood out from all the issues raised by the participants are:

- i. Most journalists stated that they would avoid the conflict-inducing attitude of portraying a conflict situation as a 'battle' between only two parties whose sole aim is to win over the same goals. In this case, the two parties would be politicians or political parties seeking to attain the single purpose of a political position. Instead, journalists stated they would focus more on issues and how they affect the population's generality.
- ii. The participating journalists also said they would apply Lynch and McGoldrick's suggestion that journalists should ask questions that may reveal commonalities between conflicting parties instead of focusing on that which divides. According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2007, 29), this helps the parties realise they have compatible and shared goals.
- iii. Journalists also said they would desist from reporting violent acts and describing horrific scenes. Instead, they said they would change their approach by showing people's delayed struggles with frustration and depravity.
- iv. One exciting area where journalists stated that they would adjust is their choice of language and tones. For example, they said they would avoid words like 'devastated', 'defenceless', 'pathetic', 'tragedy' etc. Instead, they stated they would apply the skills garnered through the training. Furthermore, journalists said they would instead report on what has been done and could be done by the people.
- v. Journalists also said they would avoid using demonising labels like 'terrorists', 'extremist', 'fanatic', 'fundamentalists' etc. Instead, they stated that they would henceforth call people by the names they give themselves. Lynch and McGoldrick (2007:30) advised that precision should be applied when describing subjects or objects in a story- e.g.,

bombers, suicide hijackers, etc. According to them, these words are less partisan and give more information.

The results from the study clearly show the effectiveness of training as a tool for building journalists' capacity to report social issues in a conflict-sensitive manner. Most importantly, the study shows the efficacy of action research as a tool for Peace, growth and development interventions. Although the study was conducted within a Nigerian context, some of the steps the researcher took can be replicated by researchers/organisations conducting or intending to conduct action research in volatile communities. Understanding communities' unique socio-political, sociocultural and ethnoreligious complexities is vital to any action research study that hopes to achieve the desired positive impact and change.

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