Early Response to Incidence of Political Violence in Nigeria:
A Review of Existing Strategies

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Abstract

In Nigeria, a culture of political violence persists, and often causes death, displacements and infrastructural damage. Various measures were introduced by the government and other stakeholders to address political violence in Nigeria; yet, there is a growing trend of violence connected with the political system. Thus, this study examines existing early response strategies for political violence in order to evaluate their effectiveness, setbacks, and sustainability. Early response strategies are critical in preventing and/or mitigating the incidence of political violence. This study aims to accomplish three specific objectives: (i) to examine the effectiveness of existing early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria; (ii) to identify the limitations of early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria; and (iii) to inform the development of integrated early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria. This study, which is based on a thorough analysis of extant literature, relevant databases and case studies of early response strategies, concludes that although some of the strategies are innovative and adaptable, they fall short in addressing emerging trends and consequences of political violence across the country. The study therefore proposes an integrated and comprehensive early response approach for addressing root causes of political violence in the country.

Keywords: Political Violence; Early Response; Early Warning Systems; Conflict Prevention and Mitigation; Nigeria

Introduction

Since gaining its independence in 1960, political violence in Nigeria has resulted in numerous cases of insecurity, large-scale evictions of citizens and other inhabitants, disruptions to socio-economic activities, and loss of human lives and infrastructure. ACLED (2023) defined Political violence as the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation, or with distinct political effects.

Nigerian government and partners including the private sector, local and international organizations have made efforts to curb the incidence of political violence; however, most studies support the claim that a culture of political violence persists in the country. For instance, while Adekanye (1989) argued that political violence is a key component of the country's historical background, Malu (2009) traced the history of political violence to the conduct of elections in 1964/1965 and afterwards. For instance, Malu (2009) linked the history of political violence to 1964-1965 electioneering process whereas Adekanye (1989) contended that politically-motivated violence is a key aspect of the country's history. Alanamu (2005) and Adesote & Abimbola (2014) directly associated political violence with the colonial era while Njoku (2010) traced it to 1959, the year of the country's first set of general elections. According to Anweting & Ogar (2018), political violence is a distinctive component of the political system in the country and critical challenge to national development. Ukah (2013) believed that political violence is at the central stage of the country while Adegoke (2018) argued that the use of thugs in the political system causes disorder and violence.

Early warning systems facilitate prompt actions necessary for mitigating the effects of, rectifying, or altering potentially violent situations prior to the emergence of conflicts. When combined, these systems create processes for providing early information to the government, organizations and citizens in regions that are prone to violence as well as alerting relevant institutions to enable them take precautionary measures in line with established procedures (Cleen Foundation, 2023; Davies, 2000). This study therefore examines existing early response strategies for addressing political violence in Nigeria in order to understand their key successes, gaps and key lessons that can inform more proactive and integrated approaches across the country.

Study Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to examine early response strategies for addressing political violence in Nigeria.

The Specific Objectives are:

i.   To examine the effectiveness of existing early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria;

ii.   To identify the limitations of early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria;

iii. To inform the development of integrated early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria.

Study Questions

In line with the afore-mentioned objectives of the study, these three questions guide the study:

i.   How effective are the early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria?

ii.   What are the limitations of early response strategies in preventing or mitigating political violence in Nigeria?

iii. What are the good practices from existing early response strategies that can inform the   integrated   and comprehensive approach for addressing political violence in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employs the qualitative design to explore and analyze data generated from secondary data drawn from journal articles, news articles, specialized databases, search engines, and case study of existing early response strategies in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (CEWER) Systems

Early response refers to any initiative that occurs in the latent stages of a perceived potential armed conflict with the aim at reduction, resolution or transformation (Austin, 2004). Early warning and early

response (EWER) systems refer to the regular and organized gathering and analysis of open-source information on violent situations by community, national and international stakeholders. The information is then connected to formal and institutionalized response mechanisms so as to prevent the violent situation from occurring (UNDP, 2021; Subedi, 2017). Early Warning and Early Response Systems aim to identify and preemptively address situations at risk of becoming violent, or to prevent escalation within already violent contexts (Leach, 2016). EWER systems are designed to be the most effective means of protecting people and preserving lives before violence occurs (Cleen Foundation, 2023); and involve the 'systematic collection and analysis of information coming from a variety of sources in order to identify and understand the risks for violent conflict in a country and to develop strategic responses to mitigate those risks' (Bello and Abdullahi, 2021). The early warning and response strategy incorporates a procedure that allows information to be fed back into the data gathering process and, when needed, provides crucial information to update and modify the current and future reaction (Austin, 2004). The strategy does not end with intervention (Austin, 2004).

Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (CEWER) systems are essential instruments for preventing conflicts and promoting peace in modern society (Messner, 2019). CEWER's early response component entails creating and putting into practice plans to deal with the root causes of disputes and prevent them from escalating; this involves actions such as communication, mediation, capacity strengthening, and provision of conflict resolution trainings. Coordination and partnerships among stakeholders particularly local communities, government agencies, and civil society organizations are necessary for an effective early response system.

Discussion of Key Findings

The key findings from this study are discussed under the study objectives.

Overall Objective - To examine Early Response Strategies for addressing Political Violence in Nigeria

Early warning systems help to assess the situations of a threat to peace and prepare actions based on the information about natural disasters and political indicators. Its efficiency depends on good forecasting of the probability and severity of a potential conflict escalating into violence including a comprehensive tool for identifying risks, reducing

their impact and coping with the residual effects (Boutros-Ghali, 1995). To enhance effectiveness, early warning systems need to rely on the direct participation of vulnerable communities, facilitate public sensitization on the risks, disseminate messages and warnings efficiently as well as help maintain a constant state of preparedness to enable early action (GDPC, 2022).

According to European Centre for Conflict Prevention (2006), early response comprises three key elements: acknowledging, accepting, and taking action on the warning. Efficient early warning response systems are capable of addressing a wide range of risks to human security including wars and armed conflict, state failure, genocide and politicide, other egregious abuses of human rights, and humanitarian disasters triggered by natural disasters (Wulf & Debiel, 2009).

When early warning and early response systems function well, they have the potential to influence policymaking, promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and monitor attitudinal changes in communities that serve as indicators of potential conflict situations. These systems are more effective when they involve well-coordinated efforts among community volunteers, civil society and international organizations, government and religious institutions. A certain degree of technological infrastructure, united political support, and human proficiency are critical for the effectiveness of early warning and response systems (KAICIID, 2019).

In Nigeria, most early response strategies for addressing political violence include a network of early warning monitors at community levels, community engagement, conflict analysis, peacebuilding initiatives, security sector reforms, humanitarian response measures, dialogues and mediation, among others. However, these initiatives have not been effective in mitigating political violence due to some barriers and limitations as will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Objective 1 - To examine the effectiveness of existing early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria

Various early response strategies have been introduced and implemented by both government and civil society organizations and other non-State actors, and will be discussed in this section under two categories: Government strategies, and non-sate actors' strategies. Also, the section will examine the effectiveness of such strategies.

A. Government Early Response Strategies for Political Violence in Nigeria

Adamawa State Peace Agency for Peace, Reconciliation and Reconstruction was established in 2018 and collaborated with the State's traditional institutions to develop an early warning and response system that would allow traditional rulers and their followers to report any threats to the peace. In order to engage stakeholders and be ready to act quickly when warning signs appeared, the Agency worked with Search for Common Ground to add community-level dialogue platforms in seven of the State's most conflict-prone local government areas (LGAs). Additionally, the Agency chaired a statewide dialogue platform that convened once a month, bringing together representatives from the community dialogue platforms, traditional rulers, government officials, religious leaders, women and youth leaders, trade unionists, and business professionals to discuss issues and create action plans. Furthermore, the Agency collaborated with the Danish Refugee Council and regional non-governmental organizations for peace to resolve disputes between farmers and herders in the state's northern region. Through the creation of an influential individuals' committee to mediate behind the scenes with important election players and the development and execution of an action plan in collaboration with the agency's major civil society partners for peaceful elections, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) collaborated with the Adamawa agency to support its own efforts to prevent violence during the 2019 general elections. Local authorities were advised to take electoral disputes to court and to pledge not to use violence against their supporters. The United Nations Development Programme's situation room, which included a phone and internet-based system, and Search for Common Ground, which enabled the public to report early warning information for immediate action, supported these efforts (USIP, 2021).

Kaduna State Peace Commission (KSPC): KSPC began its work in November 2017 and later developed an early warning and early response (EWER) system for Kaduna State following a needs assessment with different stakeholders. By the Law creating it, KSPC has the mandate to adopt proactive measures to promote peace, conflict prevention, nonviolent interventions, mediation, and peaceful resolution of conflicts at communal and intergroup levels; collaborate with other institutions of the government, media, schools, local and international organizations, pastoralists and farmers; implement peace agreements; and support the government in promoting stability and the rule of law in the State. Kaduna State's EWER system serves as a digital system with a network of empowered early reporters that

provide conflict-related data, and aims to identify and address potential threats in the initial period, facilitate instantaneous decisions and actions by a cross-section of stakeholders towards mitigating potential conflicts and violence.

Since coming into operations in August 2023, out of 125 reported cases, 65 and 61 cases were respectively documented in Kaduna and Katsina States while 53 cases were effectively resolved in less than three months. KSPC's EWER system has been effective in empowering communities and Local Government Peace Committees in early detection and response for efficient conflict monitoring and management as well as in enhancing partnerships among them towards reducing conflict and security incidents (United Nations, 2024). KSPC mediated ten conflicts including farmer-herder crisis, and cross-border disputes between Kaura local government in Kaduna State and Riyom local government in Plateau State as well as conducted dialogues with youth in Kasuwan Magani (an unstable sub-urban area in Kaduna). KSPC also established Peace Committees in twenty-one LGAs of the State with the mandate to address local conflicts; these committees are hosted and organized by local government officials and include members drawn from civil society organizations and traditional institutions. KSPC created a technical advisory group consisting of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, United Nations Development Programme, Ford Foundation, the Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance supported by the United State Institute of Peace, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, the academia and community practitioners. KSPC implemented an extensive plan to assist in preventing violence during the 2019 elections and to respond to post-election violence (USIP, 2021).training and assistance to build local authorities' capacity to manage conflicts at their roots.

Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA): The purpose of the PPBA, which was founded by the State Government in February 2016, is to: promote "a culture of peace" among the state's ethnic and religious groups; serve as a platform for coordination on peace matters between civil society organizations and international organizations; facilitate peace negotiations, post-conflict recovery, and reconstruction through the use of multitrack diplomacy, early warning systems, mediation, peace education, and training; guarantee that the policies of the government as a whole support peace and security; and create unique peace strategies that involve women, youth, and other vulnerable groups in society. The PPBA has several significant accomplishments in its initial five years of operation. For instance, it created the State's peace infrastructure; engages in direct

and indirect peace efforts through the Peace Architecture Dialogue; launched a Blueprint for Peace activities across the State focused on five key areas: research, coordination, and partnership; natural resource management; peace education; youth and gender issues; and post-conflict rehabilitation; and established Peace Committees in the seventeen LGAs in collaboration with the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs. These local units work with community leaders to promote harmony among their people and with neighbouring tribes as well as handle neighborhood-level disagreements at their source before they escalate into larger regional disputes (Plateau Peace Building Agency, 2018).

Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR): In order to ensure that Nigerian communities, government, security, and civil society actors will work together to increase the effectiveness, local ownership, and sustainability of an inclusive Early Warning Early Response (EWER) system for improved violence prevention, IPCR implemented the Peace Action for Rapid and Transformative Nigerian Early Response (PARTNER) Project. This five-year project was funded by USAID. In an effort to foster discourse, conflict resolution, advocacy for peace and reconciliation, and communication among a wide group of important stakeholders, the project is based in the community. In order to improve awareness and understanding of early warning response system, create Early Warning Response Groups (EWRGs) at the national and state levels, and foster collaboration among stakeholders for effective conflict prevention and management, IPCR organized a National Strategic Stakeholders Engagement Workshop for an Effective Early Warning Early Response (EWER) system in Nigeria on August 6, 2023, through the PARTNER Project. The creation of early warning groups (EWRGs) at the federal and state levels to improve coordination and expedite the response to early warning reports; the integration of tactical and strategic early warning approaches and data sharing among stakeholders; and the organisation of EWER workshops at the sub-national level, especially in conflict-prone areas to intensify local actions and to promote local ownership and community-based reporting—all essential for the prevention and resolution of conflicts—are some of the key resolutions made at the workshop. The National Conflict Early Warning Response Group's formation to organize and address early warning reports throughout Nigeria, especially the PARTNER Project States, was a major workshop highlight (Mercy Corps, 2023).

In addition, IPCR created the National Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Systems (NCEWERS) concept, whose main objective is to instantly notify relevant parties about conflict early warnings and

encourage prompt action. At the IPCR headquarters in Abuja and throughout the six geographical zones that comprise Nigeria's States, local regions, and communities, NCEWERS structures are split up into different parts. Social media platforms have functioned as a reliable channel for the generation and transmission of data by pertinent units, in addition to the regular baseline surveys and other fieldwork-based techniques employed by the NCEWERS in the generation of empirical data. These platforms consist of the NCEWERS system application, the NCEWERS mobile application, video conferencing, and Telegram. Zonal Peace Officers (ZPO) and Conflict Early Warning Indicator Monitors (CEWIM) utilize IPCR's Conflict Early Warning Report Application (CEWIRA) to enter conflict-related information into the IPCR Conflict database. In each of the six geographical zones, the Institute employs thirty CEWIMs to monitor and report conflict indicators as needed. The ZPOs then evaluate the reports and submit them to the headquarters database via the CEWIRA. This strategy ensures that respondent context-specific information is further reinforced by early warning information from social media platforms layered against secondary data, enabling cross-referencing and data validation. Furthermore, stakeholder collaboration in the form of cooperative planning, knowledge sharing, and best practices is used to evaluate the results of interventions. The model assists in identifying stakeholders, mapping their interconnectedness, and bringing them together to address various issues affecting conflict dynamics in their environment using stakeholder analysis and social media networks. The NCEWERS model is often used to provide policy briefs, national conflict analyses, impacts of conflicts throughout Nigeria, recommendations for Nigerians living near conflict areas, and advice to local, state, and federal governments on conflict management, prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding (Journal of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2021).

B. Non-State Actors' Early Response Strategies for Political Violence in Nigeria

West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP): WANEP's regional office established its country office in Nigeria in 2002 and created an early warning program in 2003 to strengthen early response system and produce Nigeria's incidence and situation accounts for the West African Region. The Election Barometer monitoring and analysis system was introduced for Nigerian elections of April/May 2007 which led to pre-elections' partnership commitment between WANEP regional office and the Action Congress, and subsequent actions (Ozoani-Ene, 2022). In the event of an impending conflict, Nigeria will use these early warning issues as a guide going forward (NOUN, 2022). A

Nigerian Civil Society Early Warning-Response Mechanism was established by WANEP.

Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN): As a component of the WANEP Capacity Building Program, WARN alerts a regional organization to potential threats by supplying data and guidance (European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2006). Weekly Highlights, Monthly Bulletin, Policy Briefs, Thematic Report, Quarterly Peace and Security Report, Situation Tracking, Quick Update, and NEWS Advisory Note are some of the goods and outputs produced by WARN. In order to improve human security and socioeconomic development in remote communities that are at risk of both man-made and natural disasters, including violent conflict, the National Early Warning System (NEWS) is an online system that has been in operation since 2008. It is a crucial part of the WARN Program. In order to generate conflict and peace assessment reports, early warning reports, and policy briefs that are widely distributed to pertinent stakeholders, NEWS created community-based conflict monitoring systems with local monitors. Establishing National Election Response Groups (NERG) and Regional Election Response Groups (RERG) with the duty to address any potential threats that could tarnish the peaceful conduct of the elections, as well as training community monitors, stakeholders, and hotspots identification or mapping, are some of the ways that the Election Violence, Monitoring Analysis and Mitigation (EMAM) program of WANEP aims to reduce election-related violence. Stakeholder and hotspot mapping reports, Election Weekly Highlight, Monthly Situational Report, and Communiqués are some of the products or outputs produced by EMAM. In order to report any disturbances or acts of violence from the opening to the closing of polls, WANEP trains its observers on the Survey 123 application. Additionally, the Election Situation Room (ESR) was established as an extension of the monitoring processes through its four distinct segments: data gatherers, analysts, communicators, and decision-makers (WANEP, 2021).

Search for Common Ground (SFCG): A Pilot SMS-based conflict early warning system was used by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Community Action for Popular Participation to test early warning system in the Jos region of Nigeria. 109 focal points were trained to send SMS messages of conflict early warning signs, to encourage others in their community to send SMSs, to a centralized system. Through the project, people could also submit incident reports through the project's Crowd map website. The validity of each alert was verified and key stakeholders (security, government and NGO partners) notified of the incident via SMS (it's urgent) or in a daily email

report) (Ozoani-Ene, 2022). In Plateau State, SFCG manages a participatory EWER system.

Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Initiative: is a grassroots human rights project headed by Kamari Clarke, a distinguished professor at the Centres for Diaspora & Transnational Studies and Criminology & Sociolegal Studies. It is supported by grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Clarke's Transnational Justice Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Locals, especially women who are typically excluded from peacebuilding efforts, were given the tools they needed by the EWER initiative to protect their villages and make long-lasting strategic decisions that would avert conflict. As a cutting-edge, entirely original community policing project, EWER initiative, which operated in the Northern States of Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, and Zamfara, brought together community people, women, youth, and elders, members of traditional councils and other local government officials to select representatives for the EWER stakeholders' forum. Members of the forum provide information to elected community safety partners (CSPs), who notify the community of impending or imminent attacks, confirm intelligence, evaluate the type of violence, disseminate information via funded apps, mobilize the community to respond tactically, and, when appropriate, take part in de-escalating the situation. Members of the EWER forum, CSPs, and State coordinators receive training in conflict analysis, sensitivity, risk mitigation, "do no harm" ethics, and violence response planning as well as learn how to enable geo-tracking, share, record, and safeguard data regarding violence using technological tools such as geospatial technologies powered by artificial intelligence, the CLEEN smartphone app, and the Esri Incident Reporting Platform. State coordinators, who serve as one project intermediary per State, gather community reports, pursue the necessary resource deployment, and update the public on weekly developments (University of Toronto, 2023).

Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND): PIND was established in 2010 with initial funding of US$50million from Chevron Corporation; it operates as a non-profit organization headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria with offices in Warri, Delta State and Port Harcourt, Rivers State. PIND's early warning and response model comprises five integrated mechanisms for providing stakeholders with real-time conflict early warning information and catalyzing timely response: Peace Map, Incident Reporting Platform, Field Monitors, PREVENT Committees, and Research/Analysis. With its database of conflict incidents throughout Nigeria, Peace Map is a platform that

unites various data and information sources on peace and conflict in one place. It also helps users validate and triangulate data gathered by various organizations and gain a better understanding of the peace and security landscape for sensitive peace and conflict issues. The Incident Reporting Platform is a targeted stakeholder platform that operates through SMS and the internet that gathers, processes, and distributes early warning information for preventive responses. The PREVENT Committees consists of about ten or fifteen conflict mediators formed in each of the nine Niger Delta States. Their duties include working as influencers, attending monthly meetings in their respective states, and recognizing and addressing potential antecedents to instability and violence. Field Monitors and PREVENT Committee members receive research and analytical products such as bulletins, monthly and quarterly conflict trackers, and other materials for situational awareness, stakeholder analysis, conflict analysis, and additional incident mapping. Information gathered from the Peace Map and incident reports is combined for these purposes. The Integrated Peace and Development Unit (IPDU) SMS Early Warning system provides real-time conflict incident reports, and PIND'S Early Warning and Response System leverages pre-existing data sets from vetted Partners for Peace (P4P) sources. PIND combines the secondary data sets on the Peace Map with the SMS data for triangulation and cross-validation, enabling more educated response choices (PIND, 2019).

Fund for Peace (FFP): The Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST), which was created by FFP, is a system for analyzing conflict vulnerability that evaluates a state's susceptibility to collapsing in pre-conflict, active war, and post-conflict scenarios using both quantitative and qualitative indicators. In order to produce infographics that assist in identifying important social, political, military, and economic patterns that follow the dynamics of conflict risk, this analytical model processes data from many sources. The model is highly helpful in determining conflict trends and patterns as well as risk factors for conflict (PIND, 2019).

Partners for Peace (P4P) Network: Since its inception, actions by the P4P Network have been most closely linked to reducing the likelihood of intercommunal conflict and election violence. On the other hand, they have also successfully addressed cases of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as well as gang and cult violence in certain States. P4P response operations typically comprise two main elements: immediate actions to reduce tensions and conflict risk, and long-term peacebuilding initiatives to strengthen social cohesion by developing and enhancing essential skills. In order to prevent retaliation and to

talk about alternatives to violence, P4P's quick response interventions involve mediation, negotiation, town hall meetings with impacted communities, and direct appeals to conflict actors. Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms to address intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts and tensions; building capacity to enhance economic activities to promote peaceful livelihoods in local communities; facilitating the creation of Peace Clubs in schools; and promoting peaceful coexistence through peace messaging and advocacy for peaceful conflict resolution are just a few of P4P's long-term peacebuilding interventions (PIND, 2019).

Village Monitoring System on Early Warning Early Response (EWER) project in Nigeria: EWER project started in June 2021 as a joint project of CLEEN Foundation, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Toronto awarded by the United States Department of States. It has the objective to contribute to the reduction of civilian attacks in sixteen communities in Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara states. The project was supported by the United States Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations seeks to end the cycle of violent conflict in Northern Nigeria through the empowerment of community members, including women trained to serve as peacebuilders in early detection and early response to conflict, and fostering their full participation as citizens in a more equitable economy and more tolerant religious and cultural landscape. The project was implemented over two years (Cleen Foundation, 2024).

The following outcomes indicate how effective the EWER Project has been: (i) more violent attacks were documented in the focal states, which helped to aggregate data for the purpose of predicting violence and the ongoing assessments required for operational planning of security in the nation; (ii) encouraging community cooperation and intelligence response (e.g., Community Safety Partners established in the Kaduna state's Chikun and Kajuru LGAs hold regular meetings for stakeholders to share intelligence on security-related developments in their communities through the CLEEN Foundation Village Monitoring Systems); (iii) reducing attacks against civilians, especially in Kaduna and Plateau States, through the EWER Forum platform in the four project States; (iv) increased representation of women in community and state security matters, as evidenced by the appointment of a former female member of one of the Plateau State EWER Forums to the State's formal security system and the occupying of positions as members of the EWER Forum and within the networks of Community Safety Partners across the locations tasked with gathering community intelligence and taking mitigating actions to address identified security threats; (v) creative community

securitization, such as the Vigilante Duty Roster and Schedule introduced to reduce theft incidences in Jos South LGA's Du Community; (vi) Positive Adaptation of Best Practices: For example, colleagues in the Jos community of Bisichi were able to resolve disputes among neighbours that could have escalated into conflict, while members of the EWER Forum in the communities of Jos South and Barkin Ladi receive referrals from community stakeholders; (vii) Participation in advocacy programs and strategic meetings with influential community members that support community development: For example, the installation of bore holes and the provision of farming equipment in areas where youth engage in agricultural farming have improved food security and increased employment opportunities in the community; (viii) proficiently recognizing dangers and early warning indicators, improving mitigation techniques, and averting confrontations; (ix) hosting security meetings with key players in the community; for example, until October 2022, no security meetings were held; however, EWER Forum in Maraban Kajuru successfully arranged security meetings with the Officer Commanding (OC) of the army unit in Kajuru, the Council Chairman, and other security stakeholders; and (x) the organization of effective EWER forum assessment meetings; for example, in December 2022, EWER Forum in Maraban Kajuru held an assessment meeting that resulted in a consensus that the project be continued beyond its two-year pilot phase. Overall, the EWER project was able to develop early response teams in the relevant communities with the goals of reducing violence aimed towards civilians and improving community safety thanks to extensive community participation combined with the deliberate and strategic use of technology (Cleen Foundation, 2023).

Police Accountability Program was launched in Nigeria by the CLEEN Foundation with the goal of fostering partnerships, accountability, and communication among the police. To help communities and law enforcement work together to ensure a safe election period, local governments should take a similar strategy (Strong Cities Network, 2024).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): As a proactive action for averting possible conflicts, UNDP built the Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system through its Peacebuilding Fund Project (PFP). The EWER system was designed to deal with and recognise threats early on and to make it easier to respond quickly in order to reduce conflict. An important accomplishment that highlights the effectiveness of the system is the detection and handling of possible humanitarian crises. One of the first foreign organisations to support the establishment of the Kaduna State Peace Commission (KSPC) and

the creation of the EWER framework and system was UNDP. Youth from 23 LGAs participated in a capacity-building workshop offered by the KSPC to gain a better understanding of the strategic framework and to contribute their fair share to the promotion of peace and the avoidance of conflict. Additionally, as part of its efforts to advance peace journalism, UNDP has educated and developed the ability of forty media practitioners in EWER and conflict-sensitive reporting through the PFP initiative. The Project's main accomplishment is the decrease in conflict levels in the formerly conflict-prone LGAs of Sanga, Kauru, and Jema'a (UNDP, 2024).

Nigeria Election Violence Tracker: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) was established as a US-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2014 and serves as a disaggregated data gathering, analysis, and crisis mapping project. The dates, participants, venues, names of victims, and nature of all documented instances of political violence and protests worldwide are gathered by ACLED. Established in 1997 in the United Kingdom, the Centre for Democracy & Development (also known as CDD) was later registered in 1999 in Lagos, Nigeria, and has the aim of serving as the primary catalyst and facilitator for strategic analysis and capacity-building pertaining to sustainable democracy and development in the West African sub-region. In addition to offering near real-time information on conflict patterns in Nigeria to policymakers, practitioners, journalists, researchers, and the general public, ACLED and CDD jointly launched the Nigeria Election Violence Tracker, a dedicated platform for mapping election-related violence and the impact of electoral competition on the nation's multiple concurrent crises. The Nigeria Election Violence Tracker also includes a variety of easily accessible analytical resources to support efforts to monitor violence and mitigate risk. Among these resources are: An interactive dashboard that is updated every week with the most recent information on occurrences linked to elections, including attacks on party members and electoral officials, and reported cases of political violence. Regular situation updates on political and military developments, including analysis of violence trends in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical regions (ACLED, 2022).

North-East Regional Peace Committee in Nigeria: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the Kukah Centre, a partner, established the North-East Regional Peace Committee in Nigeria and train regional peace advocates in mediation, violence-free election advocacy, and early warning systems. The organization was established in the beginning of 2019 and has since been actively involved in identifying

early warning signs in all six Northeastern states as well as coordinating regional and state-level reaction activities. Platform funded by KAICIID - IDFP works with local and religious authorities to present a coordinated plea for peace. More research is being done on this pilot concept to determine how religious communities can actively participate in early warning and response systems. (KAICIID, 2019).

Objective 2 - To identify the limitations in implementing early response strategies for political violence in Nigeria

Nigeria's early warning system is constrained by a multitude of intricate hierarchical, political, organizational, and economic issues. Ozoani-Ene (2022) identified cognitive biases, institutional incentives to act, source credibility, message resonance, and warning communication as limiting variables. Due to a lack of coordination and synergy between key stakeholders (policymakers, civil society and local actors), peacebuilding players' responses to early warning signals are often insufficient and weak. In order to address the root causes of conflict, Nigeria's approach to early warning is one-time and military junta-style rather than following the due process of peace initiative procedures. These factors include but are not limited to apathy, social contract agreements, ethnic hegemony, political party affiliation interests, the state actor factor, caber ideology, immigration and border porosity, and indifference to conflict warning signals in Nigeria. These factors frequently result in the escalation of conflict. Sometimes, financial incentives and self-interest drive Nigerians to provide information (whether accurate or false) about possible conflicts; this causes an early warning reaction to proceed at a wrong pace. Most shortcomings of early warning systems in Nigeria are frequently attributed to a lack of political will or determination; for instance, Carment and Schnabel (2004) contended that there are numerous obstacles to connecting early warning to response, which are caused by what is frequently referred to as a "lack of political will."

This section goes into additional details about some of the current early response strategies in Nigeria that were previously discussed in order to examine their shortcomings.

Pilot SMS-based Conflict Early Warning System: Search for Common Ground's EWER system was beset by issues related to mobile phone connectivity, inadequate public outreach, and inadequate training of focal points, all of which affected the volume of incidents reported (Stine, 2013, p. 5). Furthermore, not all of the information submitted was pertinent; part of it was merely pleasantries or requests for further information (Ozoani-Ene, 2022).

Peacebuilding Agencies/Commission in Plateau, Kaduna and Adamawa States: In order to successfully gather the assets, expertise, and independent power required to carry out the day-to-day tasks of fostering peace, fostering partnerships, and advancing dispute resolution procedures, these Agencies must overcome a number of significant obstacles. Developing their reputations for institutional independence and impartiality, finding sufficient and consistent funding sources, strengthening their capacity to bring together relevant government and civil society actors, promoting local peace initiatives, collaborating with law enforcement and security forces in emergency situations, and keeping up the progress of including marginalized groups (especially women and youth) in local peacebuilding initiatives are some of these challenges. The three peacebuilding organizations all mentioned that they were severely limited in their capacity to carry out their mandates by financial restrictions. The peace Agencies receive little funding from their State governments beyond the wages of their employees. The government's finances were further stretched in 2020 with the entrance of COVID-19, leaving even less money for peacebuilding interventions. Due to their financial instability, the Agencies are essentially unable to carry out interventions, respond to emergencies promptly, or fulfil their other organizational obligations as thoroughly as they would expect. A further similarity throughout all three institutions is the dearth of highly qualified technical personnel capable of executing conflict resolution and peacebuilding missions. Their capacity to conduct this work is still limited since they lack the funds to pay experts. Thus, in order to carry out some fundamental initiatives, typically in the form of community dialogues, they mostly rely on financing and technical support from local CSO networks and international organizations donor support. For example, all three institutions sourced their technical leadership from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and many of their major projects were either conceived or carried over from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Because of their excessive reliance on donor financing, the Agencies and CSOs may engage in unhealthy competition for grants for peacebuilding projects (USIP, 2021).

Cleen Foundation's EWER Project: The government cut off telecommunications early in the EWER initiative which affected the implementation of the EWER Forums, especially in the States of Zamfara and Kaduna. There were difficulties in locating and choosing enumerators for the mapping of EWER stakeholders following the shutdown. Another issue that arose during project implementation was training enumerators. Enumerators were supposed to receive in-

person training, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced a switch to virtual training. Nevertheless, because of the telecommunications blockage in the LGAs, enumerators were unable to access the virtual training and had to be transported to the capitals of the states where the virtual trainings were being held. Late at night, when network stability was highest, was when this travel was frequently planned. Additionally, the EWER stakeholder forum faced difficulties due to the unpredictable and unstable nature of the network, forcing it to move its sessions from local locations to state capitals. This entailed paying for travel and accommodations once more, which had a big effect on the project budget. Social media conversations recorded by the EWER platforms revealed a perceived lack of trust between community people and security forces after EWER members were chosen and deployed to localities. There was also a clear lack of trust in the community as a result of racial and religious divides. The project team decided to forward the date of the CLEEN mobile app training because of the possibility of negative effects on the project due to a lack of confidence and coordination between Community Safety Partners. By ensuring that community members grew to know their allies and developed a productive connection, advancing the training helped to alleviate this lack of confidence.

Inaccurate conflict assessments occasionally resulted in erroneous stakeholder identification, which led to an error in the intervention strategy. Inaccurate interventions led to a lack of perceived ownership and buy-in from the community for the EWER structures. Additionally, it led to a significant reliance on funding organizations and the absence of a long-term strategy for the EWER system. In media debates and talk shows, those in Fulani communities claimed to have been stigmatized and blamed for the crisis. The Fulani people were subjected to increased violence and poverty in already unstable settings, particularly in the Plateau and Taraba states, as a result of this stigmatization, which also caused strong feelings of antagonism, stereotyping, and ethnically motivated hatred of the Fulani people. As a result, a large number of Fulani people were uprooted in their quest for safer places to live. According to reports, 80% of Indigenous Fulani people fled to other States with their livestock as a result of the fighting. Paradoxically, widespread accusations against the Fulani occasionally also hindered them from escaping at the same time. Many of the conflict regions are characterized by thick forest terrain, which makes accessing them extremely challenging. It is extremely challenging for security personnel to find them when there is little to no road access. Additionally, 60% of mobile network lines that were registered were being used by unauthorized and unregistered customers, according to the mapping study. This made it possible for

violent offenders to elude surveillance by security personnel. Since motorbikes are commonly employed in banditry, the under-registration of them throughout the four States makes it even more difficult for security personnel to track them down. Given that many of the weapons owned by criminals are said to be more dangerous than those held by security professionals, the spread of sophisticated firearms throughout the majority of the four States posed a significant challenge to security forces. The security personnel's operations were impeded by the absence of cooperation amongst important parties in the EWER system (Cleen Foundation, 2023).

Objective 3 - To explore good practices from existing early response strategies to inform the integrated and comprehensive approach for addressing political violence in Nigeria.

Even with their drawbacks, several of the early intervention programs currently in place to combat political violence offer creative methods that can be used as models for potential nationwide upscaling or replication, especially in the states most susceptible to political violence. The following is a discussion of the best practices:

Peacebuilding Agencies/Commission in Plateau, Kaduna and Adamawa States: These Peace Agencies have demonstrated that local governments and civil society networks can be mobilised to support government units serving as unbiased peace brokers in local conflicts. Other Nigerian States and subnational governments in Africa and beyond should take note of this contemporary model that they provide. The idea is currently being considered by several Nigerian states (USIP, 2021). It's interesting to note that the Kaduna State Peace Commission (KSPC), which consists of the heads of agencies with overlapping powers, has attempted to address the issue of interagency rivalry. The Commission is composed of three traditional rulers, the SSG, security agencies, and the governor's security advisor. Additionally, KSPC has been able to get around some of the civil service restrictions that the Plateau State Peacebuilding Agency (PPBA) suffers. The KSPC was spared from regular civil service regulations by its enabling law, giving it the freedom to determine its own employment practices and mitigating some of the personnel issues that the PPBA encounters. The creative way that Adamawa has integrated the traditional institutions suggests a significant ally for the state's peace institutions. Even though a large number of the traditional leaders are financially dependent on the state government and the governor, they nevertheless have a lot of power in their communities and may play a significant role in promoting peace. Involving them in the peace process makes logical in any case, but

excluding them increases the motivation for them to behave as spoilers. The KSPC's involvement of the state's Interfaith Bureau highlights the importance of religious leaders as additional critical allies. Their involvement in local peace interventions, early warning systems, and other initiatives could significantly increase the impact of the institutions and set an example for other States (USIP, 2021).

Non-State Actors' Early Response Strategies: The EWER Programme in Nigeria has incorporated civil society organizations in many capacities, including capacity building, sensitization, design and execution, and reporting. Examples of these organizations are the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP), Search for Common Ground (SFCG), and Inter Faith Mediation Centre (IMC). For instance, SFCG manages a participatory early warning and response system in Plateau State, whereas WANEP built a Nigerian Civil Society early warning and response mechanism (Ozoani-Ene, 2022).

Cleen Foundation's EWER project, for its part, was judged to be an overall success just two years after it began. It empowered communities, included women and youth, and created new opportunities for the resolution of long-standing issues sped up by land dispossession and broken promises of modernity. The communities participating are now self-sufficient, teaching one another and continuing the work with the knowledge and skills they have gained. To reduce political violence, the concept might be replicated in other communities in Nigeria that are prone to conflicts (University of Toronto, 2023). In order to prevent a variety of potential conflicts, including those resulting from transhumance movements along designated corridors, the EWER project activated its alert mechanisms in four LGAs in the states of Kaduna and Katsina. For example, communities residing in Sanga, Kauru, and Jema'a LGAs, which were previously prone to conflict, now experience relatively lower levels of conflict. In a same vein, training programs that enhanced community knowledge and fortified capacities in data management and early warning systems inside 16 communities - Kaita and Faskari in Katsina State, and Kaura and Kachia in Kaduna State - also boosted local competencies. These communities were designed with unique tools to facilitate the exchange of information about transhumance movements, especially in high-risk places (United Nations, 2024). In addition, the first Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT) baseline report for Kaduna state was created. So far, IOM has released four such reports that provide local decision-makers with information on transhumance pathways and infrastructure requirements. Furthermore, in order to support EWER alerts, facilitate timely information on transhumance, and assist in community dispute resolution, 24 Community Response

Networks (CRNs) were established. For example, in the states of Kaduna and Katsina, the CRNs have strengthened referral systems for reporting rights abuses and guaranteeing victims' access to justice. In order to guarantee gender-sensitive and human rights-based approaches to peacebuilding, almost 120 stakeholders received training. The effectiveness of security responses in both conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts has increased as a result of this, which has also markedly improved the monitoring and reporting of human rights breaches in the two States, particularly those impacting women and girls (USIP, 2021).

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and other civil society organizations have reinforced the reporting and response protocols for human rights violations, and the NEEM Foundation continuously evaluates human rights gaps in communities, provides mediation training, and provides psychosocial support to victims of conflict. More than 200 people from a variety of communities have been affected by the over 80 reports of non-state actor violations that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has received to date. Fifty-six of these cases have already been effectively addressed after being referred to the relevant authorities. To improve protection and accountability measures and speed up the process of redressing human rights violations, human rights desks have been established in the offices of significant stakeholders (USIP, 2021).

Acknowledging the crucial role that youth play as change agents, the initiative helped to create the first-ever Kaduna State Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS). This plan, which originated from the Nigeria National Action Plan, outlined tactics for involving youth in the prevention, resolution, and sustainable peacebuilding of conflicts. Enhancing capabilities, creating a centralized EWER system for Kaduna State, combining the current frameworks, and expanding coverage to all 23 Local Government Areas are all possible outcomes of this project. As an example, the initiative will solidify KSPC's position as the principal peacebuilding organization in Kaduna State, guaranteeing its efficacy in upholding stability and promoting harmony across the region. Additionally, the Commission's workforce will possess the abilities and know-how required to successfully carry out their responsibilities as mediators, peacebuilders, and early warning responders (USIP, 2021).

Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND): PIND uses an "Applied Learning" approach to conflict analysis workshops in order to ensure sustainability and efficacy. These workshops involve

hands-on activities with tangible results, and the goal is to increase stakeholders' knowledge and proficiency in conflict analysis and planning as well as their ability to apply this knowledge to the analysis of a particular, urgent conflict issue in their state or community. By going through the entire process of a desktop study, validation session, joint planning, qualitative/participatory interpretive analysis, and after-action review, participants learn the techniques and instruments (PIND, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Many early response strategies for addressing political violence in Nigeria exist, and although they are innovative and adaptable, they fall short in addressing emerging trends and consequences of political violence across the country. The study therefore proposes an integrated and comprehensive early response approach for addressing the root causes of political violence in the country. Leveraging and upscaling most of the good practices from these strategies is critical and should be prioritized by government and other stakeholders. Also, EWER forums should be institutionalized at community, State, Zonal and National levels to enhance collaborations, data quality and management, mutual learning and early responses to political violence across the country.

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