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The Place of The Church in Peace-building and Rural Community Policing in Igbo land

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Abstract

Peace and security are essential ingredients for sustainable socio-economic development in a every society. The worsening security situation in Igboland, in the recent times, has significantly affected the general wellbeing of the inhabitants and hampered community development. This paper titled "The place of the Church in peace-building and rural community policing in Igboland" seeks to examine several efforts made by the Church to support peace-building process and to address security concerns in rural communities. The paper sets out first to look at the sordid security challenges and threats to peace in Igboland. It goes on to examine the efforts of the Church in peace building in Igboland; the Church and rural community policing in Igboland; effects of peace-building and rural community policing on security in Igboland and Challenges confronting the Church's peace-building and rural community policing support in Igboland. The study finds out that rural community policing has contributed to the reduction of the rate of kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism-related violence, vandalism, herdsmen attacks and activities of unknown gunmen in Igboland. The study concludes by showing that the achievement of effective and efficient rural community policing in Igboland cannot be easy without the full cooperation and partnership with the Church. It recommends, among others, that different Church denominations shall avoid unnecessary rivalry and work together to form a formidable force in the process of peace-building and rural community policing in Igboland.

Keywords: Church, Igboland, peace-building rural community policing, vigilante groups

INTRODUCTION

The current rise in the rate of insecurity, social unrest, communal crises, farmer/herders crisis, kidnapping, ezeship tussle and land disputes has continued to take its toll on the peace, security and stability of Igbo land. Peace is one of the most important factors in community development. When peace and security are absent in a community, there could hardly be meaningful socio-economic progress, high agricultural productivity, influx of foreign investors and improvement in the standard of living, among its inhabitants. The present day Igbo communities are no longer what they used to be in time past, as they have become riddled with violence, armed robbery, cultism, raping, ritual killings and continuous threats from the activities of unknown gunmen. As observed by Jegede and Daniel (2025), one of the greatest problems Nigeria is facing, as a nation, in the present time, is absence of peace and insecurity in almost every sphere of life. In corroborating the above, Ossai and Nweke (2023), remark that one of the persistent challenges in

Nigeria, today, is the pursuit of internal security and community peace-building, which necessitate the creation of practical methods for the promotion of harmony and stability. Suffice it to say that the present security situation in Igbo land makes life difficult for all and hinders free flow of socio-economic activities, including Church services, school activities, social events and related activities.

The Church as the mouth-piece of God and voice of the voiceless society has decided to lead the campaign for the restoration of peace, tranquility and security in Igbo land through its unflinching support for community policing. The Church, no doubt, has severally acted as a trusty connecting link between the grassroots and state-created security networks. The Church takes up the role of conscientizing its members, within the communities, on the need for their active participation in neighbourhood watch networks and grassroots security and vigilante groups to achieve sustainable rural community security. In line with the foregoing, Jegede and Daniel (2025), observe that the Church is one of the key players in



promoting peace-building in society. Peace remains a unifying and life-preserving force, vital for the achievement and development of all facets of human existence in a society (Oji & Olomi, 2022). To ensure the sustenance of peace and its effectiveness in unifying people amid recurrent conflicts violence and crises in the society, efforts are made to build or create processes that favour its thriving and wholehearted valuation among members. Peace is a state of subjecting conflicts to permanent, checks and restoration of tranquility to turbulent conditions (Babawale, 2006). It is the overall human quest for things that foster social order, undisturbed and harmonious existence, the only condition required to spark off social, political and economic development and to bring about meaningful administrative effectiveness (Jegede, 2018 in Jegede & Daniel, 2005). Peace-building, according to Reyhler, 2001 in 2018 in Jegede & Daniel (2005), includes early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy works, civilian and military peace-keeping strategies, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements and the establishment of peace zones. In a nutshell, it encompasses a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation and social transformation aimed to effectively reduce root causes and effects of conflicts on human society. The above peace-building process is one of the domains of the Church, which leverages its popular moral authority, trusted clergy networks and array of parish structures to encourage deliberation on peace, promote restorative justice and community initiated security networks to caution the effects of insecurity on rural communities. More so, the Church leads in partnership between rural communities, community vigilante and state police as a way of maintaining peace and order in the community. Thus, this paper seeks to examine place of the Church in Peace building and rural Community policing in Igbo Land

Soaring Security Challenges and threats to Peace in Igbo Land

In the recent times, events and developments in Igbo-land point clearly to the fact that its security and peace are at stake. Terrorists activities of different kinds and magnitude, thought to be the exclusive preserve of the northern Nigeria are now taking place in Igbo land (South eastern Nigeria) life and direct. In five states of Igboland, namely, Imo, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states, no one sleeps now with his or her two eyes closed because of the activities of kidnappers, unknown gun men, criminal herdsmen, armed robbers, organ harvesters, and criminal elements in the communities, who sow the seed of communal clashes and mutual distrust. As observed by Nweke and Nwankwo (2023), Igbo land popularly referred to as South east geo- political zone has been grappling with various security challenges, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, communal clashes, cult-related violence and herdsmen attacks. The zone has now become replete with nefarious activities of men of the underworld, who make every inhabitant live in fear. In corroborating the above, Onyishi (2019) cited in Nweke and Nwankwo (2023), describes the South-east geo-political zone as the zone currently infested with various security challenges

including, incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping, communal clashes and different kinds of inter-group conflicts.

The above security challenges are, however, not peculiar to South east zone but are obtainable in all parts of Nigeria. Ishola and Dabira (2020) lend credence to the above when they pinpoint that Nigeria, as a whole, faces various security challenges including but not limited to insurgency, armed robbery, kidnapping, communal conflicts and ethno-religious crises. Criminal and terrorist activities in Nigeria in general and Igbo land in particular, have taken complex and sophisticated forms to the extent that it has become difficult to promptly identify and report crimes and suspicious activities as those who are to identify and report crimes are the actual perpetrators. The growing corruption, within the law enforcement agencies and members of local vigilante, has hindered the collaboration necessary for successful community policing arrangement (Ezeani, 2021). These dangerous scenario, created by distrust, double standard and corruption on the part of those in charge of local and state security networks as well as rural community policing, has continued to render efforts aimed at effective peace-building process and community policing futile. Security collaborations are built on trust and can help to overcome the limitations faced by local vigilante groups and formal law enforcement agencies, such as limited resources, access to advanced technology, and legal framework backed up by grass root knowledge, and community development (Nwangwu & Ihuoma, 2021 in Nwankwo & Nwankwo, 2023).

The Church As an Esteemed Institution in Igbo land

The Church occupies a place of prominence in Igbo socio-religious, economic and political scheme of things. It functions as a major voice in the people's day to day decision making in all facets of life. The Church as an institution, commands great societal respect by actively shaping community values, providing moral guidance, educational and healthcare services and unifying diverse interests in the society. As Nwokocha and Nnatuanya (2024), have rightly observed, the introduction of Christianity in Igbo land brought about the exposure to new forms of life and changes to Igbo people's world views, reformed Igbo cultural systems that were considered obnoxious and added value to those seen as good and acceptable. Kokey (2026), describes the Church as an institution that represents the mouth piece of God by which he relates his will and word on salient issues of life to the world. It is saddled with the responsibility of using the word of God to reform the society morally and otherwise and instill in people God's consciousness, which manifests in the sustained desire to always do what is right and desist from evil (Madumere & Awusaku, 2019 in Kokey, 2026).

The Church in Igbo land stands firmly to uphold social Justice, peace, equity, love, social harmony, minority rights and respect for the dignity of all persons, irrespective of class and political affiliations in the society.

The Church in Peace-building in Igbo land

Any discourse about Peace-building cannot be successfully concluded without highlighting the cardinal role of the Church in promoting and sustaining peace in human Society. The Church sees man as being born in conflicts, grows in conflicts and ekes out a living in the midst of multifarious forms of conflicts. The Church is in the society to offer man peace for his happy existence and harmonious interactions with others. Christ the founder of Christianity is called "the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9 vs 6). In John 14 vs 27, Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid". The above scriptural passage informs the Church's ongoing commitment to peace building, arbitration and conciliatory services to foster harmonious and peaceful coexistence in the society.

Thus the Church adopts the following peace-building strategies in Igbo land

- i. Counseling and Arbitration: The Church's clergy men perform the role of guidance counsellors, arbiters of peace and crises managers when the community is boiling in disputes, when there is tensions arising from political differences and conflicts among members of the community, to restore peace and social harmony.
- ii. Encouraging dialogue aimed at resolving inter-community clashes. The church promotes and facilitates dialogue and advocates for community- based restorative justice in order to address age-long grievances.
- iii. Moral reorientation: Church clergy members (priests, pastors, bishops, General overseers and prophets) employ the use of gospel to preach peace, love, unity and respect for life and individual's rights and freedom, the primacy of communal harmony and the need for the youths to shun social vices like cultism, kidnapping armed robbery, banditry, and political thuggery (Kokey, 2026).
- iv. Mediation: The Church often resorts to setting up Dispute Mediation Committees to mediate disputes between conflicting communities and among disputing individuals. The committee often comprises senior pastors, priests, elders, men leaders, women leaders, youth leaders and so on.

The Church And Rural Community Policing

The Church is committed to safeguarding human life because God made man in his own image. The emergence of rural community policing in Igbo land is seen as a right step in the right direction by the Church. Nweke and Nwankwo (2023), describe community policing as an approach and tactic in law enforcement that gives priority to collaborative partnerships between the police and the community to address crime, maintain public safety and improve the overall wellbeing of communities. The Church encourages its members to participate actively in community policing, because it sees community policing as having the potential to address security challenges in Igbo land by promoting collaboration, trust

and proactive engagement between the police and the community (Nweke & Nwankwo, 2023).

The Church enhances rural Community policing by engaging local parishes and Church-based groups such as Catholic Men Organisation (CMO), Catholic Women Organisation (CWO), Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria (CYON), Anglican men Organization (AMO), Mothers Union (MU), Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) and so on, to serve in neighbourhood security watch networks and vigilante.

Effects of Peace-building And Rural Community Policing on Security in Igbo land

When Peace-building and rural community policing is properly pursued in Igboland, it will invariably have far-reaching effects on the entire rural communities. Peace-building can significantly reduce the rate of inter community clashes in Igbo land through the establishment effective conflicts management and resolution techniques. Inter community clashes are common occurrences in African communities, but peace-building have a role to play in sustaining such communities (Jegede & Daniel, 2025).

It leads to a sharp reduction in tensions, war- mongering and anarchy in the society (Oji & Olomi, 2023). Socio-economic activities, free flow regional trade and agricultural productivity are significantly enhanced in an atmosphere of peace, security and stability among the Igbo people through effective and sustainable peace-building processes.

It fast-tracks rural community development by removing divisions among people, diversion of community development projects and resources meant to better the lives of inhabitants of rural communities (Oji & Olomi 2023). Rural community policing reduces the rate of anti-social activities, such as kidnapping, armed-robbery, cultism, vandalism, hardmen attacks, and activities of unknown gunmen in the south-east zone. The study carried out by Okorie and Ugwuoke (2017) and Ome and Olumnfemi (2019) lend credence to the above assertion.

Rural community policing, through the local vigilante groups in Igbo rural communities, can contribute, in no small measure, to the preservation of lives and property of citizens by proving security at the grassroots level (Nweke & Nwankwo, 2023).

Local vigilante groups registered with the government known as Neighbourhood security watches, formed in five states in Igbo land, such as Ebube Agu, operating under Imo security Network (IMOSECNET), Agunchemba security Network, operation Udo ga-achi and Bakassi Boys, operating under Anambra vigilante group (AVG); the popular ohuhu vigilante services, Umunneator vigilante Group and local government) autonomous community vigilantes, operating under the Abia Homeland Security (AHS); Ebubeagu security Network, operating under the Enugu Neighbourhood watch (ENW) and the host of other vigilante groups, have continued to play very important role in addressing crime and providing a sense of protection within their respective communities (Nweke & Nwankwo, 2023).

Rural community policing has helped and continues to assist the police and law enforcement agencies in identifying and arresting suspects and criminal elements in the rural communities.

Challenges Confronting the Church's Peace-building and Rural Community Policing Support in Igbo land

With the current rise in cases of communal conflicts, herdsmen attacks, kidnapping, armed robbery and cult-related violence in rural Igbo communities, the Church has begun to lend greater support to local communities and security agencies to ensure that peace, law and public order are maintained in the communities. However, the Church as an active partner in peace building and rural community policing is being constrained by a number of challenges, some of which are:

- i. Lack of funds: Most churches in Igbo rural communities are faced with financial difficulties owing to poor economy of their adherents. This limits their capacity to contribute meaningfully towards financing of rural community vigilante groups and peace-building programmes.
- ii. Fear of being targets of terrorists: The fear of possibility of being targets of cultists, armed robbers, unknown gunmen, kidnappers and criminal herders has made some of the Church clergymen not be actively engaged in community peace-building and rural policing in Igbo land in the recent times.
- iii. Inter-Church Conflicts: When Churches could not properly maintain their place as agents of peace and mutual understanding in the society (Jegede & Daniel, 2025), it will be difficult for them to actively engage in peace-building in their areas of operation.
- iv. Lack of Commitment on the side of the Church to engage in a thorough investigations of the credentials and personal profiles of persons being projected by the community leaders as members of local vigilante groups. Some of them being used are very corrupt and have past records of involvement in criminal cases and have not still turned over a new leaf. Using them in peace keeping and rural security or community policing is like using a criminal to pursue a criminal, that will amount to an exercise in futility.
- v. Poor Communities in Igbo land should join hands with Local and State governments to mobilize adequate funds to equip the various registered Vigilante groups with sophisticated weapons for efficient operation, so that they can match force with force (with superior fire power) when combating armed robbers, kidnappers and criminal herdsmen terrorizing rural Igbo communities.

Conclusion

The Church in Igbo land, notwithstanding some constraints facing it as an institution nevertheless has continued to occupy a place of prominence in peace-building processes and rural community

policing to ensure that sustainable security, peace, tranquility and socio-economic development are achieved in different Igbo rural communities. When insecurity and different kinds of social instability dominate the society, nothing will definitely work, as security is paramount to meaningful socio-economic, political and religio-cultural development of any society. The achievement of effective and efficient rural community policing system in Igbo land cannot be easy without the full cooperation and partnership with the Church. There is, therefore, the need for rural communities, local and state governments, to partner with the Church in this regard.

Recommendations

To enable the Church engage in active partnership with Igbo rural communities to achieve sustainable peace-building and rural community policing, the paper makes the following recommendations.

- i. Different Churches in Igboland should form peace-building and rural community policing support committees (PRCPSC) that will be given the responsibility of organising fund raising programmes, extending invitations to people that matter, who reside outside their stations, locations or parishes and their members in the diaspora, to raise adequate funds for active support of peace building and rural community policing.
- ii. The Church and its clergy in Igbo land should be brave as soldiers of Christ, but at the same time as wise as serpent, and never bow to intimidation from criminals as they support peace building and rural community policing.
- iii. Different Church denominations should work together as one, avoiding unnecessary rivalry among them, so as to present a formidable force, as they engage in peace building and rural community policing in Igbo land.
- iv. The Church should openly resist the use of corrupt persons and criminals as members of local vigilante groups in communities where they operate.

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