Social Work and Peace Studies: Dependable Allies in the Pursuit of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Social Work and Peace Studies are distinct, yet overlapping academic disciplines that are committed to the pursuit of sustainable peace and development in order to improve people's well-being. This commitment to sustainable peace and development highlights the ability of the two disciplines to building a just and prosperous society where every segment of the people functions optimally to meet their fundamental and development needs. Drawing on secondary data, the paper explores the dependability of Social Work profession and Peace Studies as allies in the pursuit of sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. It uses the social justice theory as a theoretical framework to further explain the multifaceted inputs of the two disciplines to the pursuit of their goal. The study shows that both disciplines contribute to peace and development in Nigeria through conflict analysis and management; advocacy for human rights and social justice; and, capacity building and training, and argues that that their dependability in the pursuit of their goal is anchored on their holistic approach to human well-being and long term commitment to sustainability, among others. The conclusion drawn is that Social Work

and Peace Studies have the potential to achieve lasting peace and development in Nigeria if they are effectively utilised. In its recommendations, the paper calls on the disciplines to prioritise education and capacity building, and advocate for policy and institutional reforms that focus on peace and development. It equally urges the government and relevant stakeholders to support the disciplines in order to achieve this all-important goal.

Keywords: Social Work, Peace Studies, Dependable Allies, Sustainable Peace, Development.

Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable peace and development has become paramount in Nigeria in order to enthrone a just and prosperous society where every segment of the people functions optimally to meet their fundamental and development needs. Sustainable peace and development can build an impactful future for Nigerians, where the quality of their socio-economic, cultural, and political life can be achievable, including the quality of education and health, according to Tillman (2017). Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) further clarified that peace and development provide quality life for a country's citizenry.

However, in Nigeria, it can be argued that sustainable peace and development are lacking and this has given rise to such vices as instability, ethnic and religious divisions, insecurity, socio-economic inequalities, marginalisation/exclusion, oppression, and other injustices that have undermined peace and development, thus affecting every facet of the country. For instance, the farmers-herders crisis in the North, the militancy in the South-south, and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations in the Southeast, are a few of the cases partly connected to the absence of peace and development in Nigeria. In the submission of Friedrich (2021), the new secession calls and escalating violence in Southeast, Nigeria is linked to the age-long sentiment on marginalisation and exclusion, added to Federal Government's failure to implement the Reintegration, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation (3Rs) agenda intended to restore peace and development in the country after the Civil War. This preceding, thus, makes it imperative for urgent attention to issues of peace and development in Nigeria in order to ensure social

harmony, security of lives and property, global reputation, and economic growth and development. Otherwise, the country will continue to experience increased conflict, worsening poverty, insecurity, brain drain, and loss of global reputation, etc.

The search for pace and development in Nigeria has attracted contributions from the academia. In effect, scholars have reeled out literature in that aspect but, little academic attention, however, has been paid to social work and peace studies as dependable allies in achieving this all-important goal. This has created a gap in knowledge, necessitating inquiries in that regard. Thus, the primary aim of this study is to explore Social Work and Peace Studies as dependable allies in the pursuit of sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. This seeks to unearth the nexus and dependability of the two professions in the pursuit of this goal, and provide actionable insights that will serve as an ultimate reference tool for policy makers, scholars, and practitioners alike. Against this backdrop, the paper contends that the two disciplines are bankable tools in the Nigeria's journey to sustainable peace and development.

Understanding Sustainable Peace and Development

Sustainable peace can be seen as the long-term maintenance of peace intended to prevent or de-escalate conflicts and bring about a long-term positive change. As contained in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, it promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provides access to justice for all and builds effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (UN, 2015). Sustainable peace therefore, builds a harmonious and prosperous society, if it is achieved.

In the same vein, sustainable development, in the submission of Omeje and Nwaoha (2022), though not detached from the global understanding of the term, is the type of development that is maintained overtime and it is anchored on three interrelated pillars which are social development, economic development, and environmental protection. These elements, Lohani and Aburaida (2017), emphasized, aim at eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, raising basic

standards of living, and fostering equitable development and inclusion through greater opportunities for all.

From the definitions above, it can be argued that sustainable peace and development are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. As corroborated in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development". This claim is further buttressed by Anh (2017), who pointed out that goal 16 of the sustainable development goals sends a bold and clear message that there is a link between sustainable peace and development. Therefore, peace and development are a *sine qua non* for every nation that desires progress.

Overview of Social Work and Peace Studies

Social Work is such a broad discipline that does not limit itself to a one-size-fits-all definition because of its multi-faceted nature; in other words, it gives room for a wide array of definitions. However, for the purpose of this study, the definition by the International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] (2000) will suffice as it captures the core essence of the paper. It conceives of Social Work as a profession that promotes social change, problem-solving, and empowerment to enhance people's well-being while utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems to intervene at the point where people interact with their environment. From the above conception, it can be deduced that Social Work is a profession that is committed to creating a more just and equitable society by addressing social problems, advocating for change, and supporting people in their drive to live a fulfilled and dignified life, especially the vulnerable populations. In its drive to enthrone sustainable peace and development, it intervenes at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of relationship, adopting a person-in-situation perspective to holistically address both the internal and external factors that impede human functioning.

As a diverse profession, it encompasses a wide range of practice areas, such as community development, child welfare, healthcare, and social justice advocacy, among others with the potential of universal application to meet human needs. Its

commitment to peace and development, Flaherty (2018) notes, stems from the values that undergird the Social Work profession.

Peace Studies, on other hand, as explained by Omeje (2024a), is an interdisciplinary field of study that aims to understand and address the root causes of conflict as well as promoting peaceful resolutions. It studies conflicts, including their resolutions, and mechanisms of building and improving positive relationships among individuals, communities and nations. As a field of study, it looks at the political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of conflicts, among other aspects, essentially to promote harmonious coexistence and sustainable development, especially in the violent and conflict-ridden areas.

Knowledge of Peace Studies not only equips practitioners with skills in conflict analysis and resolutions, but also helps in building enduring communities, promoting peace and reducing violence, promoting equality, human rights, and social justice, and improving diplomacy and international relations. As an interdisciplinary study, Peace Studies draws knowledge from Social Work, sociology, political science, security studies, international relations, etc (Omeje, 2024a).

Why the Pursuit of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria?

Every nation, including Nigeria, desires the best for its citizens and this can only come to light when there is peace and development. In Nigeria, the paper has argued that these concepts are lacking leading to such vices as political instability, ethno-religious crises, insecurity, socio-economic inequalities, etc which have undermined development and affected every facet of the country.

In the Niger Delta for instance, Uduji, Okolo-Obasi, and Asongu (2020) have argued strongly that the injustice done to the region in terms of underdevelopment and age-long marginalisation by both federal government and corporate organisations led to violent militant activities in the region especially attack on oil facilities. This prompted President Umaru Musa Yar'adua to establish the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009 to realise sustainable peace and development in the region. In a similar development, the authors held that

ethnic/communal and religious clashes, arising from the absence of peace, have held the country hostage and prevented it from becoming a mutually united great nation, where its citizens are secure, prosperous, and happy. They cited communal clashes in Delta State between Igbide and Emede; Igbide and Ewhen; and, Aladja and Ogbe-Ijo, over land dispute between 2012 and 2019. From 2016 till date, they continued, there have been cases of unrelenting boundary clashes between communities in Abia state and Cross River state, AkwaIbom and Ebonyi states, Abia and Ebonyi, etc. And, on religious clashes, they noted that in early 2020 in Kaduna and other parts of Northern Nigeria, there were gruesome killings of innocent citizens mostly on religious grounds. Yet, on March 17th, 2021, there was a serious clash between Christians and some Muslim fundamentalists in Kwara state. While Onwuka and Nukueye (2024) alluded that the incessant killings and widespread armed robbery and kidnapping incidents in Nigeria, including the herders-farmers crisis today arise due to lack of peace and development, Friedrich (2021), recounted that the new secession calls by the IPOB and escalating violence in Southeast, Nigeria is linked to the age-long sentiment on marginalisation and exclusion, added to Federal Government's failure to implement the Reintegration, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation (3Rs) agenda intended to restore peace and development in the country after the Civil War. Not only in the Southeast, in Southwest and South-south, Uduji, Okolo-Obasi, and Asongu (2020) added, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) have equally agitated for their separate countries owing to lack of peace in the country.

The above scenarios and indeed many more have made it imperative to call for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. This is to enable the country achieve long-term peace, stability, and prosperity in all ramifications where Nigerians can achieve their fundamental and development needs.

It is based on the above reason that the paper explores Social Work and Peace Studies as allied disciples that can be exploited to achieve the stated goal. According to Flaherty (2018) Social Work and Peace Studies are grounded in values and theories connected to human rights, human security, social justice, development, and are inextricably and positively linked. This instance and indeed

more, therefore, affirm the indispensability of the two disciplines in achieving the goal in Nigeria, thus the position of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Social Justice Theory

The concept of social justice has undergone significant evolution over the centuries, with its modern understanding often credited to 19th-century philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham. As a prominent utilitarian jurist, Bentham linked social justice to principles that prioritise actions maximising happiness and minimising suffering (Duignan, 2024). At its core, social justice seeks to create a society that is just, fair, impartial, and equitable, enabling all individuals to thrive regardless of their status, age, race, or sex. As a theory, it provides a normative framework for addressing the structural inequalities and injustices that frequently fuel conflicts, calling for transformative changes within social structures and systems, so that all members of society have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

According to Watts and Hodgson (2019), social justice theory is a fundamental value in Social Work that underscores the importance of fairness, equity, and human rights in all aspects of human endeavour. It is rooted in the principles of equality, distributive justice, and empowerment and champions the rights and well-being of marginalised and oppressed communities. Its principles can be applied across various sectors, including social policies, educational reforms, healthcare systems, and human rights initiatives. The ultimate goal is to diminish inequalities and ensure fair treatment for all.

In Nigeria, the discourse surrounding social justice is particularly relevant in the context of peace and development because it advocates for a just and equitable society by addressing the root causes of conflicts that often lead to injustice and instability. Research by Opatunde and Oredein (2023) indicates that societies characterised by greater equality and justice are less prone to violence. They argue that social justice fosters social cohesion and inclusion, creating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for societal well-being asserting that individuals who perceive fair treatment and have access to necessary resources are less likely to engage in violent activities.

Essentially, in Nigeria, Social Work and Peace Studies can utilise social justice theory to promote inclusive policies that ensure equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, particularly in marginalized communities. This will empower vulnerable populations, providing them with access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace and development.

Social justice theory, therefore, provides crucial insights into how Social Work and Peace Studies can actively pursue sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. Through their commitment in reducing social inequalities, nurturing a culture of peace, and cultivating a more inclusive society, the path towards sustainable peace and development in Nigeria will become not only an aspiration but an achievable reality.

Exploring the Nexus between Social Work and Peace Studies in the Pursuit of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria

Social Work and Peace Studies intersect in various ways and at different levels in Nigeria to contribute to sustainable peace and development. These areas of intersection are explained below:

To achieve sustainable peace and development, both fields of study engage in conflict analysis and management. They do this at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of society to uncover the underlying causes of conflicts and develop appropriate intervention strategies to address them. They also adopt conflict management techniques such as mediation, negotiation, facilitation, etc to manage conflicts and create lasting peace and development.

Flaherty, (2018); Don, (2014); and Mayer, (2013), for instance, argued that conflict management is a natural part of Social Work practice as Social Workers are trained to identify and analyse problematic situations, develop resources, and generate solutions in order to ensure change and development. Green (2018) cited Nepal where Social Workers engaged in such activity to enhance societal well-being in the understanding that the lack of peace and harmony would negatively impact the opportunity for societal progress. Likewise, Oluwakemi and Adenike (2020)

posit that Peace Studies provides frameworks and methodologies for analysing the root causes of conflicts and developing strategies for conflict resolution and prevention. They argued that peace practitioners design targeted interventions to address grievances and promote peaceful coexistence by understanding the underlying dynamics of conflicts. These scenarios demonstrate how Social Work and Peace Studies intersect in conflict analysis and management in their drive to ensure peace and development.

Another area where Social Work and Peace Studies intersect to build sustainable peace and development is through community development and empowerment. They conduct capacity-building programmes in communities, train community members in areas including conflict management and leadership skills, and also support community development initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of lives of the communities. This is to enable communities address their own challenges and improve their well-being and contribute to peace and development.

For instance, Social Workers work with communities to identify the communities' needs, strengths, and resources to improve their quality of life; they also execute community development projects that address social, economic, and environmental challenges that undermine peace and development in the community. These projects may include community centres, schools, healthcare facilities, water and sanitation systems, microfinance initiatives, and vocational training programmes, etc. In working with communities, Social Workers take on a number of roles including brokers, negotiators, enablers, advocates, and educators. Others include analysts, facilitators, managers, coordinators, mediators, mobilisers, and researchers etc. (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Emeritus, & Emeritus, 2005; Hardcastle & Powers, 2004). On its own, Peace Studies incorporate conflict-sensitive development into community development planning to support sustainable peace and development. It emphasises programmes for peace education and capacity-building that equip community workers with skills and knowledge of conflict management. In Rivers state, for instance, Hailsham, Nnodim, Deekov, and Kobani (2024) reported that peace education programmes such as democracy education, conflict resolution training, and human rights education, influenced community development activities positively. These

programmes, they contend, gave community members and practitioners the information, tools, and resources they needed to resolve disputes amicably. Through community development and empowerment, practitioners in the two domains can achieve peace and development in Nigeria.

In another development Social Work and Peace Studies deploy advocacy for social justice and human rights to achieve lasting peace and development. Flaherty (2018) opined that the two disciplines are grounded in values and theory connected to human rights, human security, and social justice, and are inextricably and positively linked. The disciplines, Flaherty continued, defend the rights of vulnerable groups like women, children, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, through increased public awareness of social injustices, discrimination, and inequality as well as partnering civil society organisations, grassroots movement, and governmental agencies to campaign for legislative changes and policy reforms that address systemic disparities in access to opportunities and resources. While Onyekwere (2016) and Kafula (2016)) acknowledge the role of Social Workers in this regard, it is the position of this paper that by way of advocacy for social justice and human rights, practitioners of social work and peace studies can build a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria where equality, fairness, and justice prevail.

Furthermore, in their drive for sustainable peace and development, practitioners of Social Work and Peace Studies place premium on research and policy analysis. These play a crucial part in getting reliable, valid, and relevant information needed to uncover underlying problems and design appropriate intervention strategies and evidence-based policies to build lasting peace and development.

Rubin and Babbie (2016) argue that research provides practical knowledge needed to solve everyday problems in the understanding that it guides Social Workers in their intervention with individuals, families, groups, and communities, to evolve a just and prosperous society. This argument aligns with the position of Natukunda-Togboa (2016) who asserts that peace practitioners adopt research and policy analysis as useful modelling tools for social reformers who would like to foster peacebuilding and development. Given the above submissions, the paper argues

that research and policy analysis provide evidence-based information that practitioners of Social Work and Peace Studies need to launch and implement interventions leading to long-term peace and development in Nigeria.

Lastly, the two disciplines can use capacity building and training to achieve sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. These are programmes that provide avenues for participants, including students, practitioners, policymakers, and other targeted groups to acquire relevant skills, knowledge, and resources for peace and development. This could be in the areas of empowerment, conflict management, peacebuilding, human rights, and community development, among others and can be achieved through education, seminars and workshops.

Social Workers, for example, build the capacity of individuals and groups to become agents of change in their communities by training them in leadership, communication, peacebuilding, entrepreneurship, and conflict management. These aim at equipping people with relevant knowledge and skills to settle disputes that undermine development and create a harmonious and prosperous society. These processes, Hardcastle and Powers (2004) believe, are actions to strengthen the capacity of the people to identify their priorities and opportunities and to foster and sustain positive changes. In a similar circumstance, peace studies through, education, resources, and skills development, enhance the ability of the people to resolve conflicts in order to build long-term peace and development, and where face-to-face meeting is not possible, e-learning and games are used, Bryane and Milante (2012) added. This process also empowers people to become active agents of reformation and builds resilient communities capable of advancing the cause of peace and development. Therefore, both fields of study can achieve peace and development in Nigeria by building the capacity of community leaders, youth groups, women groups, civil society organisations, and targeted institutions, etc to become active agents of positive change.

Dependability of Social Work and Peace Studies to the Pursuit of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria

The major thrust of this paper is that Social Work and Peace Studies are bankable fields of study with unique capacity to bring about sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. These dependable features are discussed below:

First, they adopt a holistic approach to societal well-being in pursuit of sustainable peace and development. Practitioners in the disciplines look at both the internal and external factors that underlie long-term peace and development and provide all-encompassing solutions to address them. Social Workers, for instance, seek to address the social, economic, and environmental barriers that prevent people from functioning as members of society in order to improve their well-being while peace practitioners, beyond understanding the individuals involved in conflict, also conduct "context" analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of a conflict situation. The context, according to Omeje (2024b) includes the social, economic, political, cultural and other factors within the conflict environment that contribute to and shape the conflict.

The idea of looking at the context is underscored by the notion that most human problems lie outside the individual and are located within the system. Both disciplines therefore believe that incorporating the larger system in the treatment process will help to unearth and deal with the underlying issues that impede human well-being. Thus social work and peace focus on people and their environment and also intervene at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels to gain a comprehensive understanding of human problems and build a more just and equitable society.

Second, practitioners in the two domains encourage teamwork and collaboration among various disciplines and stakeholders in order to effectively handle the complex issues of peace and development. They engage community leaders, government agencies, civil society organisations, the academia, among others, in the conviction that a collaborative approach has the potential to pull knowledge and resources needed to build peace and sustainable development for a better society.

Chukwuezi (2000), for instance, explained that Social Workers adopt the multidisciplinary approach to development. This involves cooperation from different disciplines which enables planners to draw knowledge, skills, and resources needed to facilitate peace and development. Peace practitioners, on the other hand, deploy the multi-track diplomacy model of peacebuilding which harps on the strength and utilization of wide array of stakeholders in peace and development efforts (Best, 2015). This collaboration strengthens social cohesiveness, encourages participation in development efforts, and helps to handle difficult problems of peace and develop by utilising the respective areas of competence and networks of the various disciplines and stakeholders.

Third, the practitioners understand and address issues of peace and development in line with the distinct socio-cultural, political, and economic environment where peace and development is needed. This method acknowledges the interplay among the political, cultural, and social factors and the need to develop interventions that are contextually sensitive, especially in Nigeria with diverse and dynamic environment. Therefore, both fields of study give priority to contextually relevant interventions to enable them meet peace and development needs of the country.

In utilising contextually sensitive interventions, practitioners of the disciplines work with community leaders, religious institutions, and other critical stakeholders to enable them participate actively in determining their own futures. This creates opportunity for peacebuilding efforts that are sensitive to the differences of the stakeholders. Huber (2014), for instance, explained that peace practitioners take into account the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that influence a conflict situation. This enables them to customise interventions that fit the particular circumstances of the situation in order to meet the needs and preferences of the parties. Adopting this approach, practitioners of Social Work and Peace Studies can develop treatments that are genuinely responsive and sensitive to the environment they work with, thus contributing to their dependability in achieving peace and development.

Finally, among other reasons, Social Work and Peace Studies demonstrate a long-term commitment to sustainability efforts. They understand the implications of

sustainability thus; impacting knowledge, skills, and resources on individuals, groups, communities, and institutions through training and education. This is to build the capacity and resilience of the people to carry on with sustainability efforts.

Through the roles of the practitioners including educator, facilitator, etc according to (Hardcastle & Powers; 2004), they strengthen the capacity of individuals, and institutions to pursue sustainable peace and development. This process of impacting sustainable knowledge and skill on people and institutions contributes to the dependability of both professions in the pursuit of their goal in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to enable Social Workers and peace practitioners enthrone sustainable peace and development in Nigeria:

It is imperative for the disciplines to place premium on education and capacity building for the purpose of impacting on individuals and institutions the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to achieve sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. This will ensure sustainability of development efforts in the country.

There is need for collaboration between the two disciplines and partnership with relevant stakeholders in order to utilise their collective strengths to foster peace and development in Nigeria. This will create room for participation and input of various stakeholders and to tap into their resources and expertise for the good of the country.

Social Workers and peace practitioners should advocate for policy changes and institutional reforms that prioritise long-term peace and development at various levels of governance. This will help to foster fair, inclusive, and equitable development in the country.

Government should support Social Workers and peace practitioners in all ramifications including finance and other logistics to create enabling environment

for them to thrive in their drive to promote sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

If these recommendations are implemented, Social Work and Peace Studies can play a critical role in ensuring lasting peace and development in Nigeria needed to build a just and equitable society for everyone to thrive.

Conclusion

The study examined the position of the Social Work profession and Peace Studies as dependable partners in achieving long-term peace and development in Nigeria. It explored the areas of intersection between the two fields of study in the achievement of this all-important goal and most importantly, discussed the features that make them dependable in the pursuit of their gaol. The paper thus argued that if Social Work and Peace Studies are supported, Nigeria's journey to peace and development will be obviously a seamless one. This is because of the disciplines' goal which is hinged on creating a better society where every segment of the people can function effectively to meet their fundamental and development needs. It is therefore the conviction of the paper that Social Work and Peace Studies have the potential to build a more peaceful and prosperous future for Nigeria if their potentials are harnessed.

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