COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY AND CONFLICTMANAGEMENT IN KACHIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (2018 – 2023)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of community relations strategies on conflict management in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State between 2018 and 2023, a period marked by recurring farmer–herder clashes, banditry, and ethno-religious tensions. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, targeting adults involved in local peacebuilding initiatives, with 400 respondents selected through the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, validated through expert review, and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Findings revealed that community relations strategies including interfaith dialogues, mediation by traditional rulers, joint economic activities, community sensitisation programmes, and collaborative security efforts played a significant role in reducing violent incidents, enhancing intergroup trust, and fostering dialogue as the preferred conflict resolution approach. Community-based peace committees emerged as effective mechanisms for early warning and rapid response to emerging tensions, contributing to improved social cohesion and collective problem-solving. However, challenges such as political interference, inadequate funding, weak coordination between community actors and government institutions, limited training, and inconsistent inclusion of women and youth hindered the long-term sustainability and scalability of these initiatives. The study concluded that while community relations strategies are essential for promoting peace and stability, their effectiveness is contingent upon stronger institutional support, enhanced resources, and inclusive participation. Recommendations include formal integration of community peace committees into local governance frameworks, continuous capacity building for community leaders and stakeholders, strengthened partnerships with NGOs, and development of community-based early warning systems.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Peace, Community, and Community Relations Strategy

D74 – Conflict; Conflict Resolution; Alliances

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict has remained one of the defining challenges to peace and development in Nigeria since independence. The nation's complex ethno-religious composition, coupled with widespread socio-economic inequalities, weak governance, and competition for scarce resources, has fueled recurrent crises across various regions. Among these, Kaduna State, particularly its southern region, stands out as one of the most volatile conflict flashpoints in Nigeria. Southern Kaduna, which includes Kachia Local Government Area (LGA), has repeatedly experienced violent confrontations between ethnic, religious, and occupational groups, often resulting in extensive loss of lives, destruction of property, and forced displacement (Okoli & Lenshie, 2021).

Historically, Kaduna State's conflicts can be traced to multiple overlapping factors. First, the state is divided between a predominantly Muslim north and a largely Christian south, with significant ethnic diversity comprising Hausa-Fulani, Gwari, Adara, Jaba, Bajju, and other minority groups (Ikelegbe, 2020). Political representation, land ownership, and cultural recognition have long been sources of contention. For example, disputes over land tenure and grazing rights between nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary farming communities intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, escalating into cycles of violence that often took on ethno-religious dimensions (Adamu & Ben, 2020).

Kachia LGA, located in Southern Kaduna, epitomizes these tensions. Bordered by Kajuru, Zangon Kataf, and Kauru LGAs, Kachia is home to diverse ethnic groups, including the Adara, Hausa, and Fulani, whose relations have been strained by competition over fertile farmlands, cattle routes, and political power (Okoli & Lenshie, 2021). The LGA has also been repeatedly targeted by armed bandit groups, adding criminal violence to existing intercommunal disputes (ACLED, 2023). Between 2018 and 2023, Kachia experienced numerous violent incidents, including mass killings, kidnappings, and village raids. Nigeria Watch (2023) reports that Kaduna State recorded over 1,400 violent incidents during this period, with Kachia among the top five LGAs most affected. In 2023 alone, Kaduna witnessed 672 conflict-related fatalities, continuing a trend of chronic insecurity.

Traditional government responses, including military deployments, police patrols, curfews, and ad hoc peace committees, have yielded limited long-term results. These

interventions, while reducing immediate violence, often fail to address the underlying drivers of conflict such as land disputes, mistrust between communities, and exclusion from governance structures (ICG, 2021). This gap has shifted attention toward community relations strategies, initiatives led by local leaders, religious organizations, civil society actors, and sometimes supported by international NGOs. These strategies emphasize dialogue, reconciliation, interfaith collaboration, and shared socio-economic projects as tools for building trust and reducing violence (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2019; Adamu & Ben, 2020).

Despite government and non-state interventions, Kachia LGA has continued to experience recurring violence, making it one of the most unstable areas in Southern Kaduna. Between 2018 and 2023, Kaduna State recorded over 1,400 violent incidents, including attacks by armed bandits, farmer-herder clashes, and sectarian violence, with Kachia consistently among the hardest-hit LGAs. Although community relations strategies such as interfaith dialogues, peace committees, and grassroots mediation programs have been implemented, there is limited empirical evidence on their effectiveness in significantly reducing conflict or preventing relapse into violence. Preliminary observations suggest that these interventions face several interconnected challenges. Insufficient funding and logistical support have hampered their continuity and reach, limiting the ability of local actors to sustain initiatives beyond the initial phases. In many cases, the exclusion of critical groups such as youth militias and women has also restricted local ownership and reduced the inclusivity necessary for lasting peace. Furthermore, political interference and entrenched mistrust among stakeholders often undermine the neutrality of these programs, leading to skepticism within affected communities.

This study answered the following research questions: to what extent have these strategies for conflict management reduced the frequency and severity of conflicts between 2018 and 2023? To what challenges hinder the effective design, implementation, and sustainability of these strategies between 2018 and 2023?

The aim of this study is to assess the impact of community relations strategies on conflict management in Kachia Local Government Area between 2018 and 2023. Other specific objectives are: to assess the effect of these strategies for conflict management have reduced the frequency and severity of conflicts from 2018 to 2023; to examine the challenges hinder the effective design, implementation, and sustainability of these strategies from 2018 to 2023.

The study is important because it helps you understand how community relations strategies shape the patterns of conflict and peace in the Kachia Local Government Area between 2018 and 2023. This work guides policymakers and practitioners to

recognise which approaches genuinely build trust and which ones only create the illusion of stability. It also offers practical insights for government agencies, traditional rulers and security actors who often struggle to bridge communication gaps with communities affected by farmer–herder clashes, land disputes, and ethno-religious grievances.This study contributes academically by filling a gap in the literature, since most existing research on Kaduna focuses on metropolitan areas or the southern corridor broadly, while Kachia receives limited empirical attention.

The study is restricted to Kachia LGA, one of the 23 local government areas of Kaduna State, located in Southern Kaduna. Kachia was chosen due to its multi-ethnic composition, history of recurrent conflicts, ranging from farmer-herder clashes and interfaith tensions to armed bandit attacks, and its prominence as one of the top five LGAs most affected by conflict fatalities between 2018 and 2023.

Conflict in multiethnic societies such as Nigeria remains a persistent challenge to national integration, human security, and development. Kaduna State illustrates these pressures, and Kachia Local Government Area has seen repeated violence driven by ethnic, religious, and resource-based grievances. These realities have prompted interest in community-based strategies that rely on dialogue, reconciliation, and locally trusted institutions.

This chapter reviews the literature in three parts. First, the conceptual section clarifies key ideas such as community relations strategies, conflict management, peacebuilding, social trust, and early warning, and links them to observable indicators like incidents, fatalities, and cross community cooperation. Second, the empirical section examines Nigerian studies with attention to Kaduna and the Middle Belt, and then considers comparative African cases to identify conditions for success and common limitations. Third, the theoretical section outlines the lenses that guide this study and explains why a combined approach suits the Kachia context. The chapter concludes with a conceptual model and highlights gaps that the study addresses, including local evidence from 2018 to 2023, inclusion of women and youth, and stronger links between community platforms and state institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a fundamental concept in social science that refers to a situation in which two or more individuals or groups perceive incompatible goals, interests, values, or needs. Scholars generally view conflict as an inevitable feature of human interaction because societies are characterized by diversity in resources, beliefs, and power

relations. According to Lewis Coser, conflict is not entirely negative; rather, it can serve functional roles such as strengthening group cohesion, clarifying norms, and stimulating social change when managed constructively (Coser, 1956). Similarly, Johan Galtung conceptualizes conflict as a dynamic process involving contradictions, attitudes, and behaviours, emphasizing that unresolved structural inequalities often form the root causes of violent conflict (Galtung, 1969). From this perspective, conflict exists not only in overt physical confrontations but also in latent tensions embedded in social, political, and economic systems.

In contemporary conflict studies, the concept is often categorized into different types, including interpersonal, communal, political, and structural conflicts. Communal conflicts, common in plural societies, typically arise from competition over land, identity, resources, and political representation (Best, 2006). Modern scholars further argue that conflict becomes destructive when communication breaks down, mistrust increases, and institutions fail to provide fair mechanisms for dispute resolution (Deutsch, 1973). However, when properly managed through dialogue, negotiation, and inclusive governance, conflict can promote cooperation, social justice, and institutional reforms. Thus, the conceptual understanding of conflict emphasizes both its inevitability and its dual potential to generate either violence or positive transformation depending on how it is addressed.

2.2 Community Relations Strategies

Community relations strategies are locally driven interventions that seek to reduce tension, rebuild trust, and promote peaceful coexistence through culturally accepted processes. They are usually informal or semi-formal, and they draw authority from respected community actors and shared norms (McLeroy et al., 2003). Typical activities include interfaith dialogue platforms convened by religious leaders, traditional mediation led by chiefs and council elders, joint economic projects that create mutual incentives to cooperate, community policing and watch groups that improve early warning and rapid response, and broad based public sensitisation campaigns that counter rumours and fear. The unifying logic is relational and practical. Communities engage one another in regular contact, jointly solve everyday problems, and use recognised forums to address grievances before they escalate into open violence (Pilisuk et al., 1996).

2.3 Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to the set of processes through which parties contain, reduce, or de-escalate disputes without necessarily settling the underlying causes (Van de Vliert, 2013). It privileges the immediate goals of preventing harm, restoring a

measure of order, and creating space for dialogue, while recognising that structural grievances may require longer horizons to address (Umbreit, & Amour, 2010). In protracted settings such as Kachia, effective practice rarely rests on a single tool. Rather, it combines mitigation measures that lower immediate risks, facilitative mediation that opens channels of communication, principled negotiation that clarifies interests and options, and peacebuilding activities that rebuild relationships and social norms over time (Minko, 2024).

Burton argues that durable management of violent contention depends on recognising and meeting basic human needs that lie beneath overt demands. Needs for security, identity, and recognition shape perceptions of threat and fairness, and when they are denied, parties become less responsive to deterrence or side payments and more likely to escalate or resist compromise (Burton, 1990). From this perspective, day to day instruments of management work best when they are embedded in arrangements that acknowledge status, protect group dignity, and offer voice in local decision making. For example, agreements that reopen markets or grazing corridors are more stable when they also include assurances of safety, procedures for compensation, and visible symbols of mutual respect that speak to identity and recognition.

2.4 Peace Building

Peacebuilding encompasses strategies that rebuild social trust, repair institutions, and address the structural causes of violence so that communities can move from fragile calm to durable coexistence. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall describe peacebuilding as a comprehensive approach to creating conditions for sustainable peace, stressing that it must link security, justice, political inclusion, and social recovery in mutually reinforcing ways (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, 2011).The international evidence reinforces two design principles. First, strategies should be inclusive and locally owned so that communities recognise themselves in both the process and the outcomes. UNDP argues that locally anchored peacebuilding mobilises trusted actors, adapts to context, and sustains effort beyond project cycles, which improves legitimacy and compliance (UNDP, 2020). Second, bottom-up initiatives tend to endure when compared with externally imposed plans. Studies from Plateau and Benue show that community forums, traditional mediation, and shared livelihoods have higher sustainability when they emerge from local priorities and when they are linked to supportive state structures for resources and enforcement (Akinwale, 2010; Idowu, 2017).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored based on Social Capital Theory. Social Capital Theory explains how networks, shared norms, and trust enable collective action for mutual benefit. Putnam distinguishes between bonding social capital, ties within relatively homogeneous groups such as ethnic or religious communities, and bridging social capital, ties that connect people across group lines such as Christians and Muslims or farmers and herders (Putnam, 2000). Bonding ties can deliver solidarity, rapid mobilisation, and welfare within a group, but when dominant without balancing bridges, they may deepen social distance and harden an us versus them outlook. Bridging ties enlarge circles of reciprocity, improve information flow across communities, and create expectations of fair dealing that make cooperation more likely.

Social Capital Theory rests on several core assumptions about how social relationships generate value for individuals and communities. At its foundation, the theory assumes that social networks possess resources, such as trust, shared norms, and reciprocal obligations that individuals can access and use to achieve their goals (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). It presumes that these networks are not merely social ties but constitute forms of capital, comparable to economic or human capital, because they facilitate action and enhance collective efficiency. Another assumption is that social cohesion and trust within a community lower transaction cost, enabling cooperation and reducing the need for formal enforcement mechanisms (Coleman, 1988).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey research design within a quantitative approach to collect numerical data from respondents through structured questionnaires. The target population consisted of about 15,000 adults involved in peacebuilding activities, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula and selected through stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation of key stakeholder groups. Data were gathered from both primary sources (questionnaires) and secondary sources such as official reports and academic materials. The instrument's validity was confirmed by expert review, while reliability was established through a pilot test that produced a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.81. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential techniques (correlation and regression) using SPSS, with results presented in tables and tested at a 0.05 significance level to ensure objective and reliable findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher administered 400 questionnaires and all the 400 questionnaires were returned. The data analysis and discussion are done based on the Four Hundred questionnaires.

4.1 Data Presentation and Interpretation

4.1.1 Impact of Community Relations Strategies on Conflict Management

Table 1: Community Relations Strategies Have Reduced Violent Incidents in My Area

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	146	36.5%
Agree (A)	150	37.5%
Undecided (UD)	46	11.5%
Disagree (D)	38	9.5%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	20	5.0%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1: shows that 36.5 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5 percent agreed that community relations strategies have reduced violent incidents in their area. About 11.5 percent were undecided, 9.5 percent disagreed, while 5.0 percent strongly disagreed. This distribution reveals that a clear majorityrepresenting nearly three-quarters of respondents—believe that community relations efforts have had a positive impact on reducing the frequency and intensity of violence in Kachia Local Government Area.

Table 2: These Strategies Have Improved Trust Among Different Community Groups

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	140	35.0%
Agree (A)	156	39.0%

Undecided (UD)	44	11.0%
Disagree (D)	38	9.5%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	22	5.5%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2: reveals that 35.0 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 39.0 percent agreed that community relations strategies have improved trust among different community groups in Kachia Local Government Area. About 11.0 percent were undecided, while 9.5 percent disagreed and 5.5 percent strongly disagreed. This distribution indicates that more than seven in every ten respondents recognise that community relations initiatives have played an important role in rebuilding mutual confidence among groups that were previously divided by ethnic, religious, or resource-based conflicts.

Table 3: People Now Prefer Dialogue Instead of Violence in Resolving Disputes

Response Category	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Strongly Agree (SA)	136	34.0%
Agree (A)	150	37.5%
Undecided (UD)	52	13.0%
Disagree (D)	40	10.0%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	22	5.5%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3: shows that 34.0 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5 percent agreed that people now prefer dialogue instead of violence in resolving disputes. About 13.0 percent were undecided, 10.0 percent disagreed, while 5.5 percent strongly disagreed. This means that more than 70 percent of the respondents believe that the culture of dialogue and peaceful negotiation has gradually replaced violent confrontation as the dominant method of addressing community disagreements in Kachia Local Government Area.

Table 4: Local Peace Committees Respond Quickly to Early Signs of Conflict

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	130	32.5%
Agree (A)	142	35.5%
Undecided (UD)	58	14.5%
Disagree (D)	44	11.0%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	26	6.5%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4: shows that 32.5 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 35.5 percent agreed that local peace committees respond quickly to early signs of conflict in Kachia Local Government Area. About 14.5 percent were undecided, 11.0 percent disagreed, while 6.5 percent strongly disagreed. This pattern indicates that almost 68 percent of respondents believe that local peace committees play an active and timely role in addressing disputes before they escalate into violence.

4.1.2 Challenges of Community Relations Strategy in Conflict Management in Kachia

Table 5: Lack of Funding Limits the Continuity of Peace Programmes

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	160	40.0%
Agree (A)	136	34.0%
Undecided (UD)	46	11.5%
Disagree (D)	36	9.0%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	22	5.5%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5: shows that 40.0 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 34.0 percent agreed that lack of funding limits the continuity of peace programmes in Kachia Local Government Area. About 11.5 percent were undecided, 9.0 percent disagreed, while

5.5 percent strongly disagreed. This indicates that nearly three-quarters of the respondents believe that insufficient financial support is a major barrier to sustaining peacebuilding initiatives in the area.

Table 6: Political Interference Weakens the Neutrality of Peace Initiatives

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	142	35.5%
Agree (A)	150	37.5%
Undecided (UD)	54	13.5%
Disagree (D)	34	8.5%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	20	5.0%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6: shows that 35.5 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5 percent agreed that political interference weakens the neutrality of peace initiatives in Kachia Local Government Area. About 13.5 percent were undecided, 8.5 percent disagreed, while 5.0 percent strongly disagreed. This means that almost three-quarters of the respondents believe that political influence negatively affects the impartiality and credibility of community peace efforts.

Table 7: Exclusion of Women and Youth Reduces the Effectiveness of Peace Efforts

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	134	33.5%
Agree (A)	146	36.5%
Undecided (UD)	58	14.5%
Disagree (D)	38	9.5%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	24	6.0%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7: shows that 33.5 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 36.5 percent agreed that the exclusion of women and youth reduces the effectiveness of peace efforts in Kachia Local Government Area. About 14.5 percent were undecided, 9.5 percent disagreed, while 6.0 percent strongly disagreed. This finding indicates that the majority of respondents acknowledge the importance of including women and youth in community peacebuilding processes.

Table 8: Weak Coordination Between Communities and Government Reduces Results

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (SA)	138	34.5%
Agree (A)	144	36.0%
Undecided (UD)	52	13.0%
Disagree (D)	40	10.0%
Strongly Disagree (SD)	26	6.5%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 8: shows that 34.5 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 36.0 percent agreed that weak coordination between communities and government reduces the results of peacebuilding efforts in Kachia Local Government Area. About 13.0 percent were undecided, 10.0 percent disagreed, and 6.5 percent strongly disagreed. This means that over 70 percent of respondents believe that inadequate synergy between community actors and government agencies undermines the effectiveness of community relations strategies.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that community relations strategies have significantly contributed to conflict reduction and improved social harmony in the study area. A large majority of respondents reported that these strategies have reduced violent incidents, improved trust among groups, encouraged preference for dialogue over violence, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and promoted fairness and mutual respect. The effectiveness of local peace committees in responding promptly to early signs of conflict further highlights the success of community-based early warning and response mechanisms. Additionally, joint community development projects and government partnerships were found to enhance cooperation and sustain

peacebuilding outcomes. These findings indicate that community relations strategies have not only addressed immediate conflict triggers but have also fostered long-term behavioural and attitudinal changes that support peaceful coexistence. Overall, the results confirm that grassroots peace initiatives have made substantial contributions to strengthening conflict management and building social resilience in the community.

The findings indicate that several structural and operational challenges hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of community relations strategies. The most prominent challenge identified was inadequate funding, which limits the continuity of peace programmes and reduces the operational capacity of peace committees. Political interference was also found to undermine neutrality and public trust in peace initiatives, thereby weakening their credibility. Furthermore, the exclusion of women and youth was identified as a barrier to inclusive peacebuilding, as it restricts representation and reduces programme effectiveness. Weak coordination between communities and government agencies was another significant issue, often leading to communication gaps, duplication of efforts, and reduced impact of interventions. Additionally, persistent distrust of peace committees and limited awareness among some residents were found to affect participation and acceptance of peace initiatives. These challenges collectively highlight the need for improved institutional support, inclusive participation, and stronger coordination mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of community relations strategies.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Community relations strategies play a vital role in managing and preventing conflicts in Kachia Local Government Area. Through structured dialogue, mediation, and community-based collaboration, these initiatives have succeeded in reducing the intensity and frequency of violent incidents, fostering intergroup understanding, and strengthening local ownership of peace processes. However, sustainable peace in Kachia depends on the strength of bridging social capital, the ability of diverse groups to cooperate beyond ethnic or religious lines. Initiatives that promote joint economic ventures, interfaith dialogue, and community policing have proven to be more effective in achieving long-term stability. This supports the premise of Social Capital Theory, which posits that strong networks of trust and cooperation enable collective action and social cohesion.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Kaduna State Government should engage in continuous training and capacity development for community leaders, youth, and women involved in peacebuilding should be prioritized across Kachia LGA. Such training should focus on mediation, conflict sensitivity, and early warning mechanisms.

2. Kaduna State Government should partnership with national and international NGOs should be expanded to provide financial and technical support to local peace initiatives. This collaboration can enhance sustainability and introduce best practices in monitoring and evaluation.

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