

The Efficacy of Community Peacebuilding in African Communities: Case Studies From Nigeria and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article discusses the efficacy of community-based peacebuilding efforts to develop sustainable peace in conflict-torn communities. Using participatory action research (PAR) is a powerful means of developing sustainable solutions to a conflict: It provides the means to test peace theories and draw upon a community's knowledge and strengths in order to develop interventions. The knowledge gained can be lost if not understood within national or regional contexts, particularly if there is divergence between interests that can destroy community-based peacebuilding accomplishments. Holistic approaches facilitate sustainable peace and foster learning applicable to other situations. Two case studies, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, identified broad principles that potentially can be applied in the development of policies and practices. In the Nigerian case, two communities had experienced years of conflict. The PAR component was based on participatory dialogue. In the Zimbabwe case, political conflict was resolved through the development of a mutually beneficial peace garden.

Keywords

sustainable peacebuilding, participatory action research, community-based peacebuilding

This article discusses the efficacy of community-based peacebuilding in developing sustainable peace in conflict-torn communities irrespective of the cause being specific to the local community or externally driven. Two cases in Nigeria and Zimbabwe were selected to compare different local contexts

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and conflicts. The conflict in Zimbabwe was caused by national political disunity and economic hardships, and in Nigeria, the conflict was between two communities and land ownership. The solutions for both were underpinned by two essential components—community participation and local ownership of solutions. In analysing these cases, the intention was to identify broad indicators that could expand knowledge of community peacebuilding, for example, that of sustainability. Does local participation and ownership usually enhance sustainability of a peacebuilding effort? de Coning (2016, p. 167) posits that “. . . for a peace process to become sustainable, resilient social institutions need to emerge from within, i.e. from the local culture, history and socio-economic context.” Both cases utilised participatory action research (PAR) as a research method well suited to integrate theoretical analysis and knowledge of how conflicts can be transformed into peace, irrespective of context. The concepts of community-based peacebuilding and PAR are conceptualised differently in that PAR is a research methodology that has broad applications while community-based peacebuilding is specific to peacebuilding. Both focus on the centrality of local ownership and participation as the means of creating solutions.

The results of community-based peacebuilding efforts tend to be very positive, but there are general issues that we believe need to be considered for almost all cases: the degree to which (1) a solution can be sustainable; (2) national policies may cause conflict or disrupt a community’s peaceful achievements; (3) participation is utilised since this can range from superficial to full collaboration; (4) a community that resolved its conflict contributes to other communities, influences national policy, and fosters holistic solutions; and (5) inclusivity and integration. The article begins with literature and discussion on these issues, followed by an analysis of the two cases and identification of broad indicators suggested to be effective in diverse contexts.

Sustainability

We consider sustainability to be a crucial consideration of the efficacy of a peacebuilding initiative. de Coning links sustainability with the community’s capacity to self-organise: “sustaining peace should be about stimulating and facilitating the capacity of societies to self organize” (de Coning, 2016, p. 173). A community articulates its own problems, identifies complex issues, utilises its own knowledge of realistic solutions, and draws on its unity. Such methods tend to take place organically with solutions taking shape in nonlinear ways without predetermination. One such sustainable peacebuilding effort is illustrated in Seke, Zimbabwe, in which Chivasa (2017) designed a study aimed at reducing political violence. His initial investigation identified culturally held knowledge of conflict resolution, then utilising this knowledge, assisted in the formation of a peace committee, which included religious, political, government, and community representatives. News of the successes of the Seke peacebuilding committee spread to neighbouring communities where similar committees were established. One of the key elements was that of collective discussions and decision making. This study supports de Coning’s contention linking sustainability to self-organisation. Sustainability can also be conceptualised as an outcome of effective peacebuilding initiatives, meaning that they are likely to withstand internal and external influences.

National and Local Policies

In terms of the influence of national policies, local ownership is acknowledged as the most effective approach to conflict resolution; however, local and national institutions complement and act upon each other. National issues such as widespread poverty, inequalities, and political disunity have destructive influences on a local community. In South Africa, for example, inequalities and poverty are deeply entrenched in Black communities and are the causes of conflicts and high rates of crime (Harris & Vermaak, 2015). Community protests regarding poor government service delivery result in violent

responses (Breakfast et al., 2019, 121), who note that “violent service delivery protests have been the main daily diet across the country for a few years.” In the Eastern Cape, Zimuto (2020) investigated the use of nonviolent methods to solve problems of poor service delivery and was told by participants that violence was necessary as otherwise government would not listen to their complaints. The existence of gaps between external and internal initiatives and the associated lack of intrinsic motivations has been identified as contributing to the failures of peacebuilding interventions (Nascimento, 2017).

National support of local peacebuilding efforts is uneven. Autesserre (2017) points out that challenges occur even with well-intentioned interventions: Examples include peacekeeping forces that produce mixed results, confusion existing amongst the various stakeholders, or inadequate financial support

provided. “. . . although foreign actors routinely contribute to conflict resolution, peacebuilding efficacy relies primarily on the actions, interests, and strategies of domestic entities” (Autesserre, 2017, p. 115). Conversely, the possibility of successful local peacebuilding efforts contributing to national solutions needs further investigation so that local lessons learned can be translated into

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effective national peacebuilding strategies. The lessons learned from both national and local efforts imply that there is a vital need for continuous reflection, for challenging assumptions with the aim of arriving at broader knowledge.

Participation

Participation is widely seen as central to all peacebuilding and development programmes. Donais and McCandless (2017, p. 294) argue that there is a major shift towards inclusivity in peacebuilding, that “inclusivity means acknowledging both the presence and legitimacy of a potentially wide range of civil society and non-state actors.” This perspective provides a framework for change, noting that complex issues need to be resolved in order to achieve a truly consultative, unified process in resolving conflicts. On the local level, participation is defined as “the inclusion of the local context, local communities and agencies,” (Leardsson & Rudd, 2015, p. 825). Local participation is increasingly advocated by international institutions that “now call for ‘local ownership’ of peace processes and post-conflict state-building efforts” (Roll, 2016, p. 542). We posit that when people are involved in a participatory and consultative process, conditions are created for a collective solution to be reached.

However, simply to say a study is participatory is insufficient without recognising that it is a complex and thoughtful process, requiring constant internal and external critique and evaluation throughout the process. Feedback from both observers and participants is also necessary as often an observer or “outsider” sees a problem that those intimately involved may miss. The awareness of assumptions and the process of challenging them are furthermore essential, given that false or misleading assumptions can easily lead to unexpected or even harmful effects.

Holistic Solutions

The ideal of building and sustaining peace is that all levels of society function harmoniously, reflecting an integration of local knowledge and national policies, in short, holistic systems and principled standards. In examining how such a holistic view can be conceptualised, we take from the concept of *infrastructures for peace*, developed by John Paul Lederach several decades ago. He proposes that infrastructures for peace (I4P) are “a core ingredient of a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding” (Lederach, 2012, p. 8). A framework for creating holistic solutions is needed, given that peacebuilding

is a complex process that needs structure and a long-term vision. He suggests five principles guiding the process: *comprehensive approach, understanding the dynamic interplay between the various levels of society, the need for strategic engagement, developing the functions and roles of the infrastructure, and a commitment to sustainability* (Lederach, 2012, p. 8). “Change unfolds over time and requires a quality of presence rooted in the setting with a capacity for generative responses and a longer-term, shared vision of desired change” (Lederach, 2012, p. 10). Peace is more likely to be sustained with a more holistic and integrated approach suggested by I4P. Tsuma et al. (2014, p. 46) provide a useful conceptualisation of I4P through the use of local peace committees, which are inclusive and include “critical tools for building cohesion, while also strengthening the resilience of communities in terms of their ability to anticipate, prevent, and in some cases, recover from conflicts.” Funk (2012) argues for the creation of local and international partnerships that draw on culture as an important resource and that create conditions conducive to more holistic approaches to peace: “To meet the peacebuilding needs of the 21st century... more genuinely empowering forms of grassroots mobilization and local-international partnership are needed” (p. 396).

A holistic analysis that takes cognisance of the structural, contextual, and relational dimensions of conflict has been identified as important for sustainable conflict resolution and transformation (Lederach, 2015; Miall, 2004; Mitchell, 2002). The emergence and persistence of violent conflict are informed by the multidimensional nature of conflict and the interactions between the component factors. These interactions have also been pointed as having positive implications for the progression of transformation processes as measures directed at one dimension could have influencing impacts on another (Shapiro, 2006). Conflict transformation theorists emphasise the importance of addressing the relational dimension of conflict through programmes that confront its negative vestiges such as misperception, hatred, lack of communication, among others. Addressing the perspectives and relational patterns between adversarial groups through relevant psychological processes has implications for advancing commitments towards cooperative initiatives and improving confidence and investments in emergent resolutions (Jeong, 2009). A practical approach for actualising this goal is provided by the intergroup contact theory that proposes intergroup encounter under specific conditions as instrumental for ameliorating negative prejudices and for improving interpersonal interactions (Pettigrew, 1998). Predicated upon social psychological assumptions about intergroup relations, the intergroup contact theory proposes conditions such as equal representation from groups, availability of community sanction, provision of favourable environment for the development of acquaintances, and cooperative interactions as important factors for optimising the positive impact of such meetings (Wagner & Hewstone, 2012). In line with the stipulations of the intergroup contact theory, interactive sessions were organised in Share and Tsaragi to stimulate positive transformative processes in the participants with extended benefits to the wider community.

Inclusivity and Integration

We posit that all members of a community have the capacity to contribute to peaceful solutions and that the concept of *unity in diversity* is applicable and essential. In the case of gender, for example, in the two cases, men were dominant in structures and in violent acts, but the solution necessarily included women as essential contributors and participants. In the Nigerian case, the initiative was led by a woman who was able to ameliorate past hatreds and help build cooperative communities. Inclusivity applies equally to youth. In both cases that follow, youth were actively involved in the initial destructive behaviour and subsequently with solutions. McEvoy-Levy (2011) confirm the importance of youth involvement in peacebuilding efforts especially since there is often a lack of appreciation of the valuable role youth can play. The perception that youth are always the source of destructive actions overlooks the fact that they are frequently leaders of needed change, as witnessed in youth movements

in many parts of the world. Obaje and Okeke-Uzodike (2013), in their study of youth involvement in peacebuilding, argue that “sustainable peace can be attained by harnessing the vigour and exuberance of young people” (p. 6). The involvement of youth reinforces their pivotal place in peace processes and ameliorates the manifestation of negative behavioural tendencies.

Introduction to the Two Cases

In the cases that follow, community participation facilitated the development of solutions to long-standing conflicts. The two cases represent different contexts and conflicts, but both were resolved through participatory means. The first case is of two villages in Nigeria that had experienced conflicts for many years. The primary cause of the conflict was disunity between the two neighbouring communities caused by land disputes. The second case is in Zimbabwe where opposing national political parties had engaged in destructive conflicts for some time, creating conflict in otherwise peaceful local communities. In both cases, the researchers had intimate knowledge of the culture and the circumstances, and both were fluent in the local language. The two cases illustrate participatory peacebuilding efforts designed for a specific context and conflict and which identify elements of local peacebuilding efforts irrespective of context. Both cases used PAR, a research methodology intended to develop and test an intervention. It is cyclical, meaning the process of exploration/planning, acting, and reflection continues with improvements incorporated into each new cycle. Central to PAR is that the outcome is unknown as it is developed with participants. Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 1) emphasise the centrality of participation, PAR is “a participatory, democratic process . . . it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in pursuit of practical solution to issues of pressing concern to people.”

Case I

Community Peace in Nigeria

A combination of ineffective intervention measures and continuous degradation of social relations provide the background for protracted and destructive conflicts between two neighbouring Nigerian communities, Share and Tsaragi, situated in North-Central Nigeria. The communities are from different ethnic backgrounds that have suffered tumultuous relationships due to an age-long conflict over the ownership of land adjoining both communities. The first recorded incident of violence conflict

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occurred in 1978 and led to the death of one person (Akanbi, 2013). The more intense second incident of violence occurred in 2000 with the use of dangerous arms and ammunition, resulting in the loss of an unspecified number of lives and widespread destruction of properties. Additional incidents of violent confrontation occurred in 2008 and 2015, with the 2015 incident described as the most destructive. In total, about 40 persons have reportedly lost their lives over the years (Ahmad, 2016). Disagreements about disputed land would begin with individuals or groups from both communities, then metamorphosise into reprisals and aggressive acts involving more community members. Widespread disconnection between the Share and Tsaragi was glaringly clear by the lack of intercommunal interactions and trade.

Harsh economic conditions, which increase the demand for farming land, is a major driver of the conflict. The Share and Tsaragi conflict is specifically driven by conflicting claims of land ownership located around the boundary of the two communities. Communal conflicts driven by divergent claims

over economic and political resources have been a frequent reoccurrence since Nigeria transitioned into a democratic system of governance in 1999 (Adesote, 2017; Aghedo, 2017). Communal conflicts over boundary positions such as the Share/Tsaragi case is linked to broader structural defects including the lack of clearly defined boundaries between communities and the imposition of unrealistic demarcation arrangements (Fatile, 2011). The Share/Tsaragi scenario is further complicated by contradictory historical claims on the disputed land, with both sides claiming to be the first settlers in the area. Efforts at resolving the issue have mainly taken the form of inconsistent elitist government interventions and litigations that give minimal attention to the underlying social dynamics between both towns. In some ways, government interventions have even served to deepen uncompromising positions of both communities on the land issue.

To bridge the social gap and initiate perceptual and attitudinal changes, an action research study was implemented by the researcher which included both towns (Akanke, 2019). The action research design was structured to include *exploration/planning, action, and reflection* (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). The design was a phased approach, first, a preparatory phase to identify the nature of the conflict and the environment needed for the communities to work together; second, for participants of both communities to advance capabilities and willingness of participants to engage in cooperative endeavours for peace. Qualitative research methods including interviews, focus group discussions, and observation were employed for data collection. Interviews, consultation, and discussions were held with key stakeholders in both communities who were both youth leaders and traditional ruling council members. The goal was to secure consent for subsequent meetings and gather useful knowledge of how best to structure interactions. The preliminary exploration of the social climate revealed entrenched animosities, prejudices, and suspicion between members of both communities. The propagation of negative perceptual and behavioural patterns has been described as inimical to the emergence of cogent resolution decisions and sustainable peace as these vices encourage parties' adherence to uncompromising positions and fosters maintenance of adversarial imagery (Fisher, 2014). The youth leadership in one of the communities enforced a social ban preventing its members from interacting with members of the other community. Both communities were highly protective and cautious in dealing with the research, driven by the tensions existing in both communities. Consequently, responsibilities for the recruitment of participants for the interactive sessions were vested in the youth leadership of the two communities. Deliberate efforts were directed at entrenching key principles of gender representation despite the conservative inclinations of both communities. The researcher, a woman, was able to model equity in creating solutions.

A two-staged interactive programme was organised in both communities to create conditions for constructive discussions with an extended impact on local peace processes (Akanke, 2019). This approach involved convening both separate and joint intercommunity sessions of 2 days each with the separate sessions coming first. The separate interactive meetings were intended to advance the knowledge of the participants on nonviolence and other important conflict resolution concepts. The two-staged

approach was suitable for the context in view of its usefulness for breaking the ice, ameliorating the negative effects of distrust, and most importantly, preventing the negative degeneration of intergroup encounters (Muchemwa, 2015). Although the nature of the interactions

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was flexible, an intervention guide was utilised to direct the pattern of interactions on specific focus areas, themes, and concepts. The points identified were as follows: knowledge improvement, cooperative interactions, conscientisation on nonviolence, and personalisation. Important elements of the interactive sessions such as the facilitative style and exercises were developed utilising ideas from relevant authorities on dialogue and conflict resolution (Alternatives to Violence Project, 2002; Bajja &

Ohana, 2012; Francis, 2002). The intervention guide included sessions on ground rules, introductory exercises, discussions on violent and nonviolent approaches to conflict, role-plays, audiovisual clips, listening exercises, short speeches, discussions on communication and community, and evaluation. Most importantly, the separate discussions allowed for constructive exchange of practical ideas on the conflict and the initiation of perceptual and attitudinal adjustment processes necessary for the joint session. The exercises created an atmosphere that fostered the articulation of perspectives and stimulated reflection on core issues.

After conducting separate meetings in both communities, the result was agreement that joint interactive sessions would be useful, structured to ameliorate the communication gap that had existed between the two communities and to encourage friendly intercommunity interaction. The creation of an atmosphere conducive for an interaction session was achieved through suitable seating arrangements, ground rules, and icebreaking exercises that provided opportunities for individualised interactions between participants. A total of 35 persons, mainly youth, from both communities participated in all the interactive sessions.

Notable challenges were encountered in the planning of the meetings stemming from fluctuating tensions between both communities. The actualisation of the intervention goals, however, demonstrated the influence and potential of dialogue as the means of disrupting negative social patterns and creating opportunities for cooperative ventures that could have a widespread effect on the wider community. The interactive sessions, particularly the first joint interactive session, disrupted the social gap that had existed between members of the two communities. Another important impact of the meetings gleaned from participants' evaluations was the formation of acquaintances and the amelioration of prejudices. Participants from both communities stated that the joint sessions provided opportunities for them to reconnect with estranged friends and establish new connections. Exchanges of ideas took place on cultural peculiarities and how cooperative relations could be maintained between both communities.

An emergent decision from the joint meeting was to create a photo story project utilising relevant pictures from both communities and the nomination of facilitators for the photo project, an indication that a transformative process had been triggered. The production team that was made up of representatives from both communities had controlling influence of all aspects of the photo project including the nature, choice of sites, and the medium of circulation. Youth leaders developed collaborative alliances. The utilisation of youth-friendly exercises and innovative tools such as social media initiatives boosted the proclivity of the youth to engage in other change-oriented programmes that could have widespread impact in both towns. Studies have shown that the incorporation of technology-related creative processes has implications for boosting active engagement of youth in social change processes (Bau, 2014; Blazek & Hraňová, 2012). These practices have been specifically noted as instrumental for creating positive spaces for divergent groups to address their differences.

The product of the collaborative photo story project was circulated to members of the broader community through WhatsApp and Facebook, both of which are widely used in the communities. The photo story was a short video clip that depicted significant landmarks in both communities and emphasised the similarities between both communities. It was well-received by both communities particularly given the positive nature of the video. The potentials of the dissemination of such media messages in stimulating engagements in similar production by members of the larger community have been recognised (Bilali et al., 2017). Months later, there were indications of plans to establish a joint youth association that would include membership from both communities. The actualisation of such intentions will play a key role in solidifying peaceful relations between members of both communities.

The study reinforced the importance of appropriate contact-based interventions and the development of intergroup friendships (Hewstone et al., 2014; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004). The intergroup friendships

were a major contributing factor in eliminating negative intergroup encounters and presented the strong possibility that intergroup hostilities would not reoccur. Closely linked to the impact of new and reformed friendships are perceptual changes that were stimulated during the separate and joint encounters. By providing an avenue for cordial intercommunal interactions, the meetings allowed for a discussion and identification of the segregatory behaviours and sentiments present, thereby providing a foundation for the development of intergroup trust. Postinteraction interviews (the reflective phase of action research) were held with participants weeks after the programme. Participants stated their appreciation for the knowledge gained of core themes of peace and nonviolence such as patience and love. They attributed the lessons gleaned from the separate sessions as instrumental for improving individual interpersonal conflict resolution capabilities and for boosting the zeal needed to engage in social change initiatives. Some of the participants confirmed they had discarded previously held negative dispositions such as suspicion, dislike, and fear. The content and nature of the engagements that emerged during the separate meetings were credited to have influenced improved knowledge of the key values of conflict resolution and also strengthened commitments towards constructive conflict resolution approaches. Crucial insights gleaned from the meetings were extended to other members of both communities. This transfer of knowledge was facilitated by participants with high social standing and respect in their communities.

Core aspects of the meetings' planning process such as the communities' willingness to participate, logistic issues such as date and venue, and nomination of participants were finalised cooperatively during the intercommunal initiatives. They were primarily organised by the youth leaders of both communities. Initially, youth were silent and overtly expressed reluctance to engage in peacebuilding projects because of the intense nature of conflict such as distrust, animosity, and breakdown in

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communication. The interactive sessions only became a possibility after a deliberate decision and commitment had been made at the collective level to address the negative social patterns existing between both communities. This commitment was facilitated by a number of initiatives, notable was the organisation of a joint prayer meeting. The joint prayer meeting featured impressive atten-

dance from both sides and marked the beginning of a turnaround in the interactions between both communities. A number of declarations were made during this meeting, one was a "formal" decision to terminate hostilities between both sides and the encouragement of social interactions between members of both communities.

Overall, the initiatives created constructive approaches for addressing intercommunal conflicts that led to the preference of nonviolent solutions.

Case 2

Peace Gardening Among Rival Political Party Supporters

Political rivalries between the two dominant political parties in Zimbabwe have led to a breakdown of community relationships in previously peaceful communities. Increases in violence, intolerance of opposing party members, and fracturing of social norms are attributed to party politics on a national level but whose influences can be strongly felt in local communities. This study is located in one such Zimbabwe community, the Welkom Hoek communal farmlands, located on the eastern side of Masvingo Town in Masvingo Province. The Welkom Hoek area is predominately composed of new Black

farmers who benefitted from the government's 2000 agrarian land reform (Nyatsanza, 2012) in which previously White-owned farms were reallocated to Black farmers (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019). Welkom Hoek was characterised by local community members divided along party lines in the aftermath of election-related violence and long-standing evidence of division, disunity, and lack of cooperation among community members (Tesoriero, 2006, p. 185). Moyo (2013) and LeBas (2006, p. 433) point out that Zimbabwe had gone through cycles of violence between the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU/PF), and the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The majority of the people in the Welkom Hoek community had experienced beatings, arrests, unlawful detentions, torture, and loss of close family members due to election-related conflicts since 2000. The situation in the area in 2018 demonstrated unhealed wounds traced back to systematic structural violence, part of Zimbabwe's history of colonialism (Chikwanda, 2014, p. 24). Unemployment in the area has been around 87% for some time (Zimbabwe Population Census, 2012) which allowed people to be manipulated for gain during and after the elections (Bratton et al., 2016).

Previous attempts to promote unity and encourage community members to embrace political diversity were unsuccessful, and an important reason for such failures was that initiatives were not owned by the local communities but by external actors. The motivation for this study was to investigate participatory methods with the aim of restoring peace in the community, to test a community-“owned” approach in resolving postconflict division and disunity among the community members in a way that fostered respect of political diversity and tolerance of differing views. The study used a qualitative PAR model with initial data generated through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations and underpinned by the theory of peace and power, in which power is conceptualised from the perspective of *power with*, or *peace power*, instead of *power over* (Chinn, 2013). This theory draws from group dynamic ideologies, partially advanced by Freire (1970) in his writings in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that call for working together in fair and cooperative ways to promote peace, reinforcing teamwork, and challenging competitive and divisive ways (Mattaini, 2008, p. 1). The call for community members to participate in community education and to organise themselves into groups and take part in community projects are related to intergroup contact theory, which argues that coequal contact is necessary in rebuilding positive relationships and trust (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). These theories are interrelated: Power with reflects the power of a group to work collaboratively for the benefit of the community. The concepts of peace power were selected to underpin this study since it could be a useful tool, relevant in transforming postconflict relationships. Its versatility and applicability in various contexts, including the transformation of postconflict relationships in peacebuilding, suggested a valid paradigm.

This study proposed the use of peace gardens, initially working with a small number of community members drawn from the country's two rival political parties and allowing them to take the leading role in developing and carrying out an intervention strategy. The intended aim was to build sustainable peace. Initial data were collected through interviews of the local traditional and political leadership and a farm owner who agreed to allocate a portion of land for a peace garden. After initial data were collected, people were identified from the community who had been ravished by political violence and who were willing to participate. They were selected after two focus group sessions and with the assistance of the Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice who had vast knowledge of the community. They constituted an action team (AT) of 10 people drawn from the country's two dominant political parties (MDC and ZANU-PF). Through ongoing discussions, the study's objectives were explained and misconceptions dispelled that the research might be a “regime change” project or that it was political in nature. The fact that the researcher was introduced by traditional and political leadership from both political parties and had grown up in the area helped cement rapport with the participants. Moix

(2016) confirms that participation of local actors in peacebuilding has yielded tremendous results and contributed meaningfully to sustainable peace.

When the research concept was first introduced to the rival political party supporters, there was a great deal of acrimony among community members. The first logistical meetings were tension-filled with the political party supporters from either side vowing never to work together. It took time to explain the research objectives in such a way that members pledged their commitment towards a common project, overriding their earlier vow to never work together. Although this initiative of bringing political rivals together was unthinkable at first considering its sensitive nature, the platform provided the opportunity to explain in detail the aims and objectives of the study to the people concerned; subsequently, they accepted the idea and agreed to participate.

The eventual success of the initiative can be traced to strong local knowledge, lengthy preliminary preparations, involvement of local leaders, and the AT's involvement in the planning itself. Had there been no deep understanding of the culture and the context and the careful planning, the peace garden was likely to end in yet another conflict. The majority were at first sceptical of being perceived as "sell-outs" by other political members. The party members were also afraid of being blamed for disclosing

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party secrets to rival political party supporters; hence, before the project could be started, the people's attitudes had to be transformed to allow them to work harmoniously together in the peace garden. The reaction by the AT participants, with their initial resistance to working together and the wide range of misconceptions that had to be dispelled,

was a clear indication that AT participants would not change their attitudes over a short period of time: The preliminary process took months. Leadership of both parties granting permission to conduct this research also helped in convincing the differing supporters to participate in the peace gardening initiative. The participants were also persuaded to take peace gardening seriously after realising that when people band together, they can do extraordinary things.

The collaborative action resulted in the transformation of relationships among former political rivalries and also demonstrated the power of communities in peacebuilding. The peace gardening initiative provided a meeting platform for community members, a move that was vital in that it enabled community members to converge and harmonise their differences, a development that was previously rare. The peace garden concept itself resonated with community members—the land was communal as was the community, and gardening is part of most households' activities. The collaborative action also promoted dialogue among the former political rivals with such dialogues providing a natural environment for the participants to express their views, and it encouraged people from different political parties to engage and talk to each other. It also served as an agent for social change among community members, a feature that helped them develop forgiveness of those whom they perceived as enemies or rivals before the peace gardening initiative.

Apart from their transformed relationships, the community members also realised financial benefits from the sale of their gardening produce which ranged between US\$400 and US\$500 per participant. Although the main objective of this peace gardening project was to transform postconflict relationships, it improved their livelihoods (Chitongo & Magaya, 2013). The peace garden had green vegetables, onions, and some carrots, but the main crop was tomato. The generated amount was shared among the 10 AT participants and helped in paying school fees and for their personal upkeep. The peace gardening project proved to have multiple benefits ranging from transforming postconflict relationships, positive livelihoods outcomes, poverty alleviation mechanisms, food production, and crime prevention.

The preliminary evaluation exercise revealed that the peace gardening initiative provided the Welkom Hoek community with a community meeting platform and that the peace garden promoted constructive dialogue among political rivals. The peace garden also acted as an agent for social change, a tool for eradicating poverty, and a debating tool for peace-related issues. The peace gardening initiative also made meaningful strides towards the minimisation of hatred barriers, promoted the provision of support to bereaved families by the AT, and sharpened their gardening skills. The evaluation demonstrated the success of a community-based project whose measure of success is that the project expanded and generated new ideas. Projects not supported by the people themselves in the community tend to fade away once the project organisers depart. Regardless of the positive elements noted, the preliminary evaluation revealed that the peace garden was, however, negatively affected by climatic change, a problem that calls for alternative water sources such as boreholes.

Proper implementation of this intervention strategy at grassroots level as suggested in this study has the potential to enhance the efficacy of communities in building sustainable and durable peace. This intervention strategy also has the potential to remove political stereotypes from rival political party supporters. The other vital component added to the peacebuilding discourse is that, while gardens have been mainly used for community building or nutritional purposes, this study proffered that the same gardens can be used in transforming postconflict relationships among political party supporters in ways that demonstrate the power of communities in promoting peace. It utilised principles of the contact theory in developing the intervention.

In this case, the peace gardening project resulted in the establishment of a Zimbabwe Peace Gardening Trust in 2018, whose purpose is to promote peaceful coexistence and community cohesion that celebrates diversity for all Zimbabweans. It is intended to improve the livelihoods and conflict resolution and mitigation skills of the community members. The peace gardening concept fits well in the Zimbabwean context on the basis of the knowledge they have of growing crops and the land availability that was obtained at no cost because of the agrarian land reform in 2000 (Zvobgo, 2016). Irrespective of context, the principle working together provided the means for difficult conflicts to be resolved.

Discussion

Key points identified in the cases indicate the possibility that knowledge gained in a local community may be more broadly applied to regional or national projects.

Sustainability: The cases support de Coning's (2016, p. 173) argument cited above, including the articulation of their own problems and utilising their own knowledge of how best to solve the problem. In both cases, the solution was unknown and evolved in a nonlinear way. In the Zimbabwe case, the eventual formation of a trust provided the possibility of sustainability. In the Nigerian case, the solution was the unexpected integration of youth as drivers of the solution. The evolution of community-based initiatives support the concept that peacebuilding efforts can be sustainable.

National and local policies: Inadequate national policies were partially responsible for land disputes in the Nigerian case. In Zimbabwe, economic crises and political conflict filtered down to the local community and was a major cause of the problems. The formation of a Trust in Zimbabwe indicated how such a project could be used in other communities or nationally and foster constructive interaction of local and national initiatives. The skills adopted in the Nigerian case could ultimately be used to resolve land conflicts irrespective of government inaction.

Participation: Once the groups agreed to work together, the ideas of what could be done came from the participants. The use of PAR provided a systematic way of achieving the aim of resolving a conflict

even though the outcome was difficult to predict. The deep knowledge of context was an essential element. Dialogue and praxis were core components of both studies and created the means for frank discussions to take place. Dialogue is somewhat formal in definition but in practice allows for discussion since it closely resembles ordinary conversation but has a purpose of identifying key issues. Contact is necessary; however, if not carefully constructed, the result can be the opposite with prejudices growing stronger instead of being resolved (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). The opportunities for new friendships created new understanding of each other. While differences existed, they ceased to be sources of disunity.

Holistic solutions: Closely linked to the concept of participation is that solutions need to be holistic in that a deep understanding of context is needed for a peacebuilding solution to be effective. Conflicts are complex, and simplistic solutions can make situations worse as noted by McKeown and Dixon (2017). Lederach (2015) identifies structural, contextual, and relational dimensions of conflict as needed to be understood. In both the Zimbabwe and Nigerian cases, these dimensions were considered before developing as intervention. For example, relationships had been fractured and rebuilt more constructively; community structures were utilised to create better conditions. A small, local community project can provide a very useful setting to examine such issues carefully and subsequently influence other communities with knowledge created, and knowledge gained can be incorporated into larger scale projects. In these two cases, dialogue, praxis, participation, contact based on equality, harnessing the power of a united community for the benefit of all, and allowing for nonlinear solutions to dynamically evolve were essential factors that led to a successful intervention.

Inclusivity and integration: Implicit in each of the above points is that inclusivity is not only an ideal but requires actualisation, again, in a nonlinear way. In the two cases, gender, for example, was not specifically mentioned as the cause of the problem was about land or political conflicts, but without women's involvement in all aspects, we argue that not only is the effort likely to fail, it is unjust as it omits half of a community from its own affairs. This also points the centrality of participation in considering the efficacy of peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The overarching issues of sustainability and the influence from national problems remain: While there may not be a clear answer or solution, the power of the community when united for positive reasons can combat negative forces. Participation is not simply bringing people together but requires a deep understanding of the nuances of culture and of thorough, prior preparation. Part of the efficacy of a constructive outcome is the degree to which the process is transparent; has an open, respectful, and trusting environment; and that the purpose is clearly articulated. Representation from all community structures enhances the quality of the outcome and the possibility of sustainability. When participants consult together, solutions are likely to be innovative and uniquely designed for the group or community, thus challenging the efficacy of bringing a predetermined, prepackaged proposal. Constant reflection and flexibility allow for solutions to unfold over time and as participants develop confidence in their ability to resolve problems.

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