

SPECIAL REPORT

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Nigeria's State Peacebuilding Institutions: Early Success and Continuing Challenges

By *Darren Kew*



Conflicts between herders, such as these Fulani men pictured in 2014, and farmers is a priority concern for Nigeria's state-level peace agencies. (Photo by Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters)

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Summary

- Over the past five years, three states in Nigeria's Middle Belt—Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa—have created peace agencies or commissions, initiated by the governors. Several other states are now considering their own.
- These peacebuilding institutions are tasked with addressing long-standing ethno-religious and other divisions in their host states through direct mediation and other peace interventions; building early warning and early response systems for local conflicts; and, in conjunction with local governments and traditional institutions, developing grassroots conflict resolution infrastructure such as mediation and restorative justice units and processes.
- Budgetary constraints have limited their effectiveness, and perceptions of a lack of independence from the governors' offices have sometimes reduced their credibility, though closeness to a governor may provide needed assistance to an agency's work. All three institutions possess important convening powers to initiate dialogue and larger peace processes.
- Although the young institutions have faced difficult challenges, they have nonetheless exhibited early promise for stemming violence and insecurity across Nigeria, and their experiences provide important lessons for other states considering similar institutions.

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**MEDIATION,
NEGOTIATION
& DIALOGUE**

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the progress of peace agencies or commissions in three Nigerian states since 2016. It finds that their convening powers and civil society networks offer important opportunities for fostering peace, as does their ability to support the peace architecture of local governments. Based on more than fifty interviews conducted between 2018 and 2021, the report was supported by the Africa Center at the United States Institute of Peace and the Bureau for Conflict Stabilization Operations at the US Department of State.

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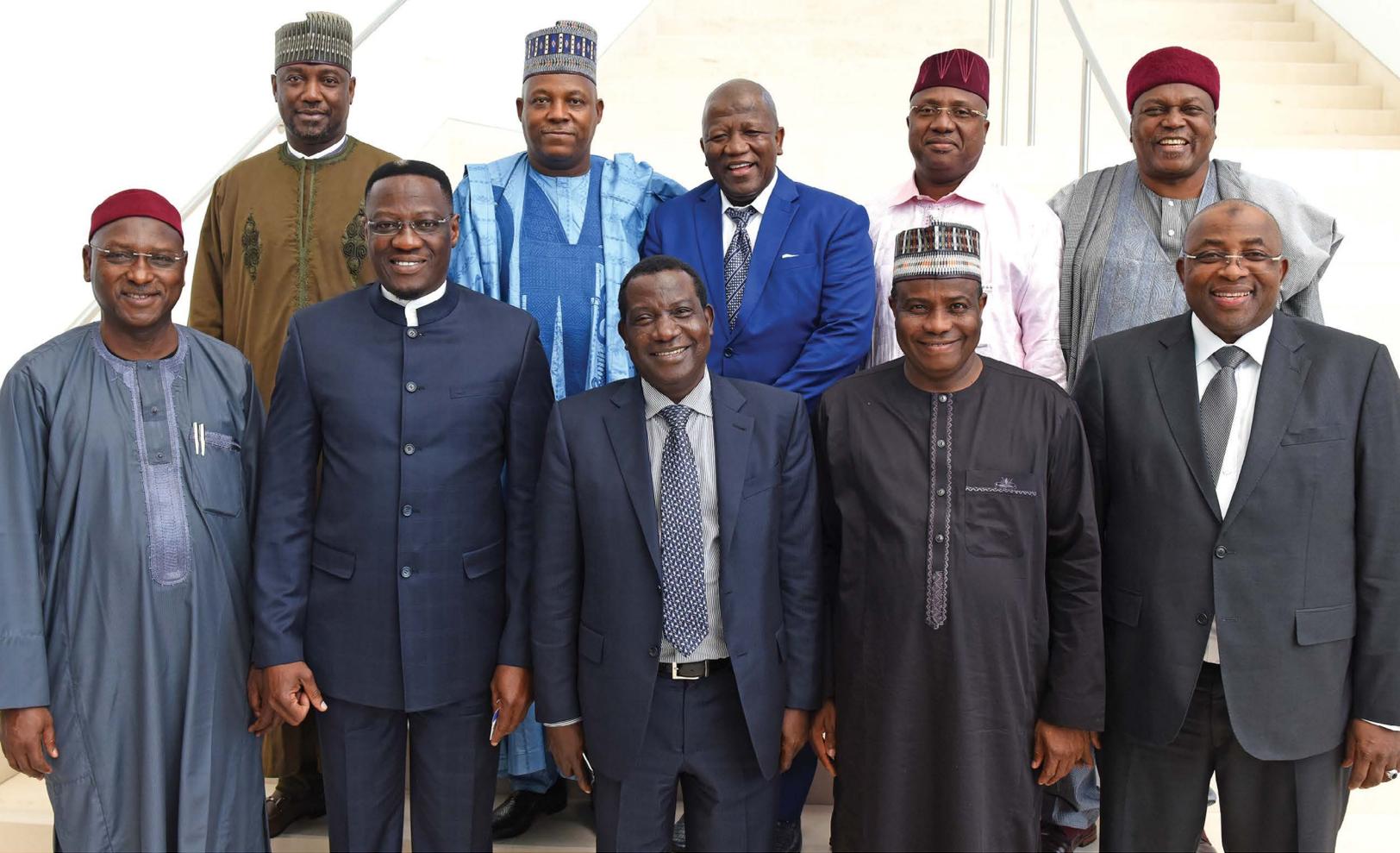
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Plateau State Governor Simon Lalong (bottom center) and former Adamawa State Governor Bindo Jibrilla (top, second from right) stand with other governors attending a 2016 symposium on state-level governance in Nigeria hosted by the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. Nigeria's governors are the most powerful institutional actors in their states; three have started peace agencies, and others are considering doing so. (Photo by USIP)

Introduction

Nigeria's Middle Belt—a region stretching across the center of the country and forming a transition zone between the nation's predominantly Muslim north and Christian south—has been wracked by deadly conflict for decades. Increasing desertification in the far north of the country has driven largely Muslim nomadic herders south into the territory of indigenous farmers, many of whom are Christian, leading to fierce conflicts over land control and water use as well as over access to government resources. Local disputes along ethnic and religious lines have also flared up across the Middle Belt over similar issues. Government and civil society mediation attempts to calm these conflicts have so far found it extremely difficult to address their root causes.

Since 2016, three states in the Middle Belt—Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa—have tried another tactic: the establishment of government-based peace agencies or commissions. While Kaduna and Plateau States had in the past created ad hoc peace committees to review specific flare-ups, the idea of setting up permanent peace units at the state level was altogether new. These entities offer the potential for bringing conflict resolution initiatives to the community level, helping to address disputes at their source before they spread and ignite larger ethnic, religious, and political powder kegs across the states. Plateau's agency has existed since 2016, Kaduna's commission since 2017, and Adamawa's agency since 2018. (A similar unit at the federal level, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, was established by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000.) Despite the short tenure of the state peace institutions so far, certain identifiable factors



PLATEAU, ADAMAWA, AND KADUNA STATES

Adapted from artwork by Rainer Lesniewski/Shutterstock

leading to success or challenges have emerged. The experiences of these institutions provide valuable lessons as several other Nigerian states consider forming their own peace institutions.

This report provides an assessment of Nigeria’s first three state-level peacebuilding institutions, with an emphasis on the challenges they faced in their first few years of existence. It is based on interviews conducted in October

2018, October and November 2019, December 2020, and March 2021 with leaders of the Plateau Peace Building Agency, the Kaduna State Peace Commission, and the Adamawa State Agency for Peace, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (soon to be renamed the Adamawa Peace Commission), and with key NGO and community partners of the three entities. Opinions from experts in the Nigerian peacebuilding field with no direct connection to the peace institutions were also sought, as were the perspectives of donors, civil society actors, and Nigerian state and federal government officials. Together, the more than fifty interviews offer a picture of great promise for the state peace institutions if they are able to manage the impartiality challenges and build effective coalitions with NGOs and other civil society and traditional institutional partners.

The Ambit of State Governors

Worldwide, government-based peace institutions make important contributions to peace and conflict resolution work within their states.¹ These entities bring the convening and regulatory powers of government and the possibility of accessing state resources, yet they also face important limits when governing actors are seen as key parties to disputes. In Nigeria, the issue is made more complex by the three distinct levels of government—federal, state, and local—which are often in dispute over authorities and responsibilities.

Nigerian state-level peacebuilding institutions in particular face the challenge of overly strong state governors. The long years of military rule in Nigeria—all but four years from 1966 to 1999—left behind severely dominant executive branches at all levels of government, as well as political cultures that reflected authoritarian patterns.² Although much has changed during the last two decades of civilian rule, the governors remain by far the most powerful actors in their states. The highly disproportionate amount of power governors are able to wield, especially in budgetary

matters, means that all local politics take place within their policy orbit.³ This dominance of the governors creates an existential problem around political and financial independence for state peace institutions, one that is expressed in funding instability and in their need to be seen as impartial by disputants who are opponents of the governor and the ruling party.

Nearly all of Nigeria's states are overwhelmingly dependent on federal allocations for their budgets, and these funds are largely disbursed directly to the governors.⁴ Consequently, peace institutions, like other state agencies, are deeply reliant on a governor's funding preferences, and are often given broad mandates but little financial support. Nigeria's National Assembly and President Muhammadu Buhari's administration have passed amendments and regulations to ensure direct payments to local governments and state assemblies, and new federal efforts to support this requirement are also being considered, but so far the governors have largely managed to circumvent these reforms and retain full control of the funds. Though state assemblies technically must approve budgets before they are spent, in practice the governors have used their control of the legislature and state funds to ensure a large measure of compliance from legislators.

Effective control of resources means that competition to win gubernatorial elections is extremely intense, and many governors find it especially difficult to be viewed as impartial actors. This dynamic creates a second challenge for the peace agencies: the need to be seen as politically independent of a government that provides at least some funding and clout. This is complicated when a peace institution is also administratively housed within that same government. Overcoming this fundamental structural dilemma of being a state entity in a system dominated by the governor—that is, requiring sufficient independence so as to be seen as impartial, yet needing gubernatorial support at the same time—remains the key challenge Nigeria's state-level peacebuilding institutions face as they move out of their infancy and seek to become key catalysts for conflict resolution and prevention in their states.

A perception of agency impartiality is especially important because of the contentious political climate in Nigerian states. Some governors may be perceived as direct or indirect contributors to conflicts and violence in their states, fueling opposition to government policies in states that are already ethnically, religiously, and politically polarized. Deep-rooted patterns of corruption and patronage also tend to undermine the daily business of state governments. Government agencies, therefore, are often painted with the same brush and presumed to be engaging in policies or service deliveries aligned with the governor's agenda.

Peacebuilding, by contrast, requires a certain measure of impartiality and expertise for mediators and facilitators to gain sufficient confidence of and credibility with disputants to conduct peace processes, to mediate agreements, and ultimately to resolve conflicts.⁵ Though strict neutrality is not required, peace actors typically need to be seen as having a certain measure of independence and political distance from groups in conflict in order to build trust, bring parties to the table, and move the peace process forward. State peace institutions, therefore, face the same problems that other state entities face in that they work in the shadow of the governor, and many constituents find it hard to distinguish such units from the governor's interests.

At the same time, despite the clear funding shortages and impartiality perception issues faced by Nigeria's state peace institutions because of their link to formal government, the engagement



Men load cows that will be sold at market onto a truck outside Garin, Nigeria, on September 2, 2018. Conflicts between farmers and herders have become more violent. (Photo by Adriane Ohanesian/The New York Times)

of the governor can be tremendously helpful, if not essential, for peacebuilding activities. The power and resources available to governors means that their substantive involvement or support can have an enormous impact, and in some cases may be necessary to make a peace initiative effective. In addition, access to the fundamental building blocks of successful state peace institu-

tions—budgets, staff, equipment, supplies, and the like—requires gubernatorial support, which is also necessary for overcoming hurdles in other parts of government and the civil service.

Questions surrounding impartiality and financial support will remain key issues for state peace institutions as they negotiate their organizational status and mission commitments in the future. Only three states have established such units so far, and the oldest is just five years old. In reality, they are still in the liftoff phase of activities and finding their footing in relation to the governors. Nonetheless, what has been accomplished so far offers important lessons for the future and for other states interested in setting up similar peace structures. Both Plateau's agency and Kaduna's commission have begun to build a highly effective model in which they use their convening powers as gateways to the government in order to organize civil society coalitions around key peacemaking goals for their states. The Adamawa agency also instituted an innovative variation that engages traditional institutions in early warning and early response efforts, particularly in regard to election violence. These institutions have so far shown great promise for spearheading more peace and conflict resolution programming at the local level, where efforts tend to have the best chance of success in addressing the roots of conflict.

Plateau Peace Building Agency

Governor Simon Lalong established the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA), the first such agency at the state level in Nigeria, in February 2016, less than a year after his election. The agency reports directly to the governor and is occasionally invited to meet with the Executive Council, which serves as the governor's cabinet, effectively making its director general a quasi cabinet position. The agency replaced a special adviser to the governor on peacebuilding and absorbed several functions of other preexisting units of the government.

PPBA's enabling law tasks the agency with promoting "a culture of peace" among ethnic and religious groups in the state; to be a coordinating platform for civil society groups and international organizations on matters of peace; to facilitate conflict settlements, post-conflict recovery, and reconstruction through multitrack diplomacy, early warning, mediation, peace education, and training; to ensure that the overall evolution of government policies supports peace and security; and to develop special peace strategies that engage women, youth, and vulnerable groups in society.⁶

In its first five years, the PPBA achieved a number of key successes. Perhaps the most important has been the agency's efforts to build the peace infrastructure of the state—to blanket the state with government structures and networks capable of responding to conflicts. One of the most important of these efforts has been the work the PPBA has conducted with the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, a cabinet-level state agency, to set up peace committees in each of the state's seventeen local government areas (LGAs). These local units are able to address neighborhood-level conflicts at their source before they flare into wider regional disputes, and they can engage local traditional rulers in building peace among their constituents and with neighboring groups. The agency has also worked with a broad range of local civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in direct peace efforts (e.g., conflict resolution NGOs) or indirect efforts (e.g., relief and development organizations) in joint monthly meetings on conflict issues in the state, known as the Peace Architecture Dialogue. In addition, CSOs assisted the PPBA in developing its five-year strategy, which included a blueprint for peace activities across Plateau State focused on five key areas: research, coordination, and partnership; natural resource management; peace education; youth and gender issues; and post-conflict rehabilitation.

In accordance with its five-year strategy, the PPBA launched or participated in a number of dialogues and peace interventions across Plateau State. The agency initiated several efforts to address the growing farmer-herder crisis in the state, including a multilevel dialogue on a government-proposed ranching policy, a series of stakeholder meetings to address early warning signs of conflict in three local governments, and a mediation effort between the Berom and Fulani communities in the Bachit district of the Riyom LGA. The PPBA also participated in a seven-month dialogue facilitated by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Plateau's southern senatorial zone, leading to the signing of a peace accord in December 2016 by representatives of fifty-six different ethnic communities in the state.

During the 2019 general elections, the PPBA held several dialogues with local stakeholders in an effort to prevent election-related violence, particularly in the volatile Riyom and Barkin Ladi communities. The Network of Nigerian Facilitators and the Justice and Security Dialogues followed up later with a three-day series of inter- and intracommunity dialogues in Riyom, Barkin Ladi, and Bassa LGAs to discuss lessons learned from the 2019 elections and examine ways to improve civil-military relations.⁷ (Many of these convocations and intervention efforts were supported by the United States Institute of Peace [USIP].) The agency has also built a noticeable media presence on Plateau State radio and television and on other radio stations in the state, such as Jay FM, Unity FM, and Silver Bird.

Civil society activists interviewed for this report frequently cited the PPBA's convening power and its bridging role between government and civil society as two of the agency's most important attributes. The agency provides an important platform for CSOs to speak on peace issues, and therefore

Because the [Plateau State Peace Building Agency] is organizationally located in the office of the governor, many people . . . presume the PPBA is just another part of the current governor's agenda.

to help frame them. In this way the PPBA plays something of a guarantor role, making the work of civil society more legitimate and broadly known through government channels.

Some activists therefore feel that the PPBA is well-placed to be the key coordinating mechanism for peace initiatives in Plateau State. With hundreds of NGOs active across the state, with many assisting or engaging in peace work, a forum for

organizing and focusing these efforts would be a significant contribution. PPBA's monthly meetings were repeatedly cited as a helpful vehicle for developing strategy for peace interventions and organizing activities. (These meetings were originally organized by Search for Common Ground; they are now augmented by a second set of meetings, the Justice and Security Dialogues of USIP, which targets a separate audience.) Without international assistance, however, local activists fear that the agency will be unable to convene these meetings as frequently or with the same level of participation, since some groups need financial assistance to attend. The agency would like to provide grants to local organizations but does not have funding to do so at present.

The main challenge facing the PPBA, cited by some local activists and individuals in communities that support opposition parties, is the perception that it lacks independence and consequently is not impartial, despite the many efforts its leadership has made to maintain balance. Much of the problem is structural: because the agency is organizationally located in the office of the governor, many people, particularly those from communities that generally support the opposition People's Democratic Party, presume the PPBA is just another part of the current governor's agenda. Because of the extreme ethnic and religious polarization across the state, the PPBA faces a constant ethnic calculus in all that it does, particularly among members of communities that voted heavily against Governor Lalong in 2015 and 2019, even though some of the agency's leadership hail from those communities. One NGO activist summed up these antipathies toward the agency in terms of its leadership being "seen as the governor's."

Overall, civil society activists interviewed had mixed views on the question of PPBA impartiality. Some organizations see the agency as fairly well-meaning and balanced in its approach. Others fear that the PPBA is too much in the governor's orbit. As one said, reflecting the views of a number of others, "They are very politically minded and led, and pro-government." Observers cited instances of the director general being sent to represent the governor's view on the ongoing farmer-herder conflict at a conference and appearing on radio and television to present the government's position on peace and conflict issues, leading to the impression that he or the agency speaks for the governor.⁸ Some activists are also concerned that allowing the PPBA to be under the governor's office and occasionally to meet with the governor's Executive Council makes the agency too political and contributes to its being conflated with security agencies in people's minds, which underscores their concern that if the director general were to become a full member of the Executive Council, the agency would become even more political.

In addition to the external perception of the PPBA as insufficiently independent of the governor, the agency has faced difficult internal challenges with other arms of government through interagency rivalries. Two other state units have somewhat overlapping mandates with the PPBA, and their rivalrous relations have undermined their collective impact. The first is the Permanent

Secretary for Security in Plateau State, a unit that, prior to the PPBA's creation, had taken the lead in conducting government-led peace and security dialogues. The second is Operation Rainbow, an interagency security team that was created by Governor Lalong's predecessor. Operation Rainbow has early response responsibility on security matters, while the PPBA has been given early warning responsibility based on its ability to gather information from its peace dialogues and other activities. Over time, these agencies have made progress in differentiating their roles, with the PPBA focusing on preventive and longer-term peace measures and the others focusing more on immediate security concerns. Still, difficulties remain.

Competition and differences with other agencies have also undermined progress. The office of the accountant general, for instance, has sometimes significantly delayed the release of intervention funds and salaries for the PPBA. The agency has seen its funding requests take up to three or four months before they are filled, all but negating its ability to respond to emerging crises rapidly. Moreover, the PPBA must compete with CSOs for funding; and donor resources, according to NGO leaders, were falling sharply even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency continues to try to diversify its funding base, looking for corporate and individual donations in addition to international donors.

Without funding, the PPBA has been unable to implement its road map for peace fully and is often not on the ground in key conflict communities. Budget limitations forced the agency in its first two years to hold many of its meetings in Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, rather than in communities experiencing conflict. Though the agency reports it held more meetings in affected communities in the past three years, a lack of resources has kept it from doing essential follow-up to the initial interventions, contributing to a perception of a lack of will to do so. As one NGO leader said, "So many resolutions from communities are not implemented, and early warning signs are not followed. If government does not like the resolutions, it won't implement them."

The third major challenge for the PPBA is its lack of expert staff skilled in peace work and conflict resolution. The agency currently has twelve regular staff, most of whom are seconded from other agencies. Other than the director general and the director of programs, none are conflict resolution professionals. It also has fourteen or more unpaid volunteers working at any given time. The PPBA has made important progress, however, in getting staff some basic training, and most are now certified as mediators.

This lack of professional staff at the outset meant that CSOs had to draft much of the strategy and the road map for the PPBA. The agency's ongoing lack of funds means it is unable to employ outside experts to conduct research, design programs, handle communications, and carry out other basic functions. In addition, PPBA leadership continues to seek training opportunities to increase staff skills in dialogue, mediation, advocacy, project design, monitoring and evaluation, strategic conflict assessment, communication, understanding and enhancing the role of women in conflict and peacebuilding, and interfaith dialogue. The agency is also interested in restorative justice but says it does not have the capacity to engage in such programming at this time.⁹ Restorative justice systems provide facilitated and mediated approaches to criminal cases, such as through healing circles, and aim to foster greater personal responsibility and community support for healing.¹⁰ These techniques are influenced by and mesh well with traditional African practices and offer low-cost, high-efficiency systems for improving local criminal justice while addressing the root causes

of local conflicts. USIP supported introductory training in conflict analysis, restorative justice, and mediation for the PPBA and the Kaduna State Peace Commission in October and November 2019, but additional training, especially in restorative justice practices and systems, is required before these institutions can move forward in providing these services themselves.

Kaduna State Peace Commission

The Kaduna State Peace Commission (KSPC) began work in November 2017, in part inspired by the example of the PPBA but also building on the experience of temporary peace commissions set up in the state for short periods in the past. Initiated by Governor Nasir El-Rufai, the commission has a five-year mandate that the legislature will need to extend if the commission is to continue beyond that time, and commission members hope that the state legislature will make the KSPC permanent. Members of the commission noted that the governor gave the commission a limited time frame of operation to ensure that some evaluation of its impacts would take place before it became a permanent part of the state bureaucracy, and commission leadership is optimistic that the legislature will indeed support permanent status when the time comes. The commission remains in regular contact with legislators over its performance and budgetary matters.

The law creating the KSPC tasked it to “adopt proactive measures” to promote peace, conflict prevention, nonviolent interventions, mediation, and peaceful resolution of conflicts at the communal and intergroup levels. The mandate also encourages the KSPC to work with the media, schools, local and international organizations, other government agencies, and farmers and herders, and to implement peace agreements and assist the government in strengthening stability and the rule of law. Much of the work of the KSPC in its first year focused on developing its own strategic framework, launching its programming, and building relationships with community stakeholders statewide. All religious groups in the state were engaged by these outreach efforts with the notable and concerning exception of the Shiite community (since the government had proscribed the group, the commission could not directly contact it). The commission held stakeholder engagements to develop its strategic plan, which it completed in November 2018.

The KSPC intervened in ten different conflicts in its first year, primarily conducting intergroup meetings and mediations on the farmer-herder crisis, some of which, according to KSPC staff, were supported by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Commission leaders report that target communities have so far been welcoming of these interventions, and that the KSPC is in the process of sorting the participants from these neighborhoods into smaller working groups. The commission has also worked with the USIP-supported Network of Nigerian Facilitators to conduct dialogues with youth in Kasuwan Magani, one of the most volatile suburbs of Kaduna, and between the local governments of Kaura in Kaduna State and Riyom in Plateau State over cross-border disputes. The commission has also set up peace committees in all but two of the state’s twenty-three LGAs, and contacted all the LGA chairs and asked them to include funding for these committees in their future budgets. The peace committees are hosted and organized by local government officials but include civil society and traditional institutional members, and are tasked with addressing local conflicts. Many of these committees were very active in the run-up to the 2019 elections, and the KSPC

A man with an ax walks past a house in the Gyallesu district of Zaria, Kaduna State, on February 3, 2016. The house is marked with bullet holes from recent clashes between Shiite militias and the army. (Photo by Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters)



itself engaged in several interventions during the election period.

Shortly after opening its doors, the KSPC created a technical advisory group consisting of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the United Nations Development Programme, the Ford Foundation, the USIP-supported Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance, the federal Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), academics, and local practitioners.¹¹ The media have also been a helpful partner for the commission. KSPC leaders have been on television and radio to discuss the origins of conflict and how to react in a peaceful manner, and called on youth not to engage in violence during the local government elections in May 2018. The commission implemented an extensive plan to assist in preventing violence during the 2019 elections and to respond to postelection violence.

The independence issues dogging the PPBA were particularly noted by the designers of the KSPC, who took two important steps to address them. First, the KSPC was established as an independent commission, not as a state agency in the office of the governor. It reports to the governor through the secretary to the state government (SSG), the head of the state's civil service, but is not considered part of the cabinet. It is expected to function independently under the leadership of its commissioners. Second, the governor appointed a prominent figure to chair the commission, Josiah Idowu-Fearon, who as secretary general of the worldwide Anglican Communion (and former archbishop of Kaduna) brings his own powerful network and influence base to the position. In addition, the commission's executive vice chairman hails from Southern Kaduna, the part of the state widely seen as home to the governor's deepest political opponents.

Commission leaders went to great lengths at the outset to make public statements promising to be independent, nonpartisan, and inclusive. Overall, most observers in the state approached for this report felt that the KSPC has managed to establish an impartial reputation. In addition to these public pronouncements, the commission's relationship-building focus for its first year appears to have helped bolster confidence among the civil society activists who were aware of its existence. The very fact that it is a multimember commission consisting of prominent individuals has reduced the pressure and singular focus that a one-person-led agency faces.

The [Kaduna State Peace Commission] has had almost no money for programs or interventions except for a small grant from the Ford Foundation. . . . Without more ambitious state funding, it will continue to face constraints on its activities.

So far, both KSPC members and civil society activists appear fairly united in the opinion that neither the governor nor the government has directly or indirectly interfered in the commission's work. Overall, the KSPC appears to have avoided the structural impartiality concerns with which the PPBA has struggled. Nonetheless, the KSPC has not completely eluded controversy over its political leanings.

One of the governor's leading political opponents, the Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), publicly opposed Bishop Idowu-Fearon's nomination as chair, alleging that he was too sympathetic to Muslim interests and to the interests of the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. Kaduna State's primary division is between the northern half of the state, which is predominantly Muslim and ethnically Hausa and Fulani, and the southern half, which is predominantly Christian and home to several ethnic minorities and SOKAPU's base. Despite this opposition, however, SOKAPU has not shut its doors to the KSPC.

The KSPC and PPBA maintain close contact with each other, and the KSPC has learned much from the PPBA's experience. This has been particularly true in regard to managing internal relations, which are not as rivalrous or as mission critical as the PPBA's, ensuring that the KSPC's future existence is less politically fraught than the PPBA's. The KSPC has made some effort to assuage the problem of interagency rivalry through the commission structure, which includes the leaders of agencies with overlapping mandates. Security agencies, the security advisor to the governor, three traditional rulers, and the SSG all sit on the commission, and the KSPC and civil society observers alike report few major interagency problems to date. The state's Interfaith Bureau is not represented on the commission, but its director general is invited to any meetings in which religious conflict is involved. The KSPC also asked the Interfaith Bureau to help develop a system for interfaith work, which it is considering, and is working with the Ministry of Education to develop a peace education curriculum for schools. According to a KSPC member, the commissioner for local government affairs has been cooperative in assisting with coordination at the local government level and in encouraging the involvement of traditional rulers in KSPC initiatives, in accordance with the commission's statutory mandate.

The KSPC is not part of the State Executive Council, nor do its leaders think that would be desirable, out of concerns that such an arrangement would undermine the commission's impartiality. The KSPC members interviewed did, however, suggest that having the commission represented on the State Security Council could perhaps be helpful, but only after they have early warning data available to share with the council (discussed below). Otherwise, such a close relationship with security agencies could undermine perceptions of KSPC impartiality.

The KSPC has managed to avoid some of the limits that the PPBA has faced with the civil service. Its enabling legislation exempted the KSPC from normal civil service rules, allowing it to set its own hiring terms and thereby avoiding some of the staffing woes the PPBA faces. Despite this statutory hiring freedom, however, all of the KSPC's initial staff members were seconded from other agencies, and, like the PPBA staff, most do not have conflict resolution backgrounds or skills. Consequently, KSPC leadership is hoping to acquire training assistance in conflict analysis, dialogue, mediation, and negotiation as the PPBA has for its staff and volunteers.

The commission hopes to build an information and communications technology–based early warning and early response system soon and has some local civil society systems that it can build on to do so, though it is likely to need external assistance with this effort as well. Situating the KSPC as a vehicle for creating local mediation and restorative justice options for individuals and communities in the state is a more distant goal, but commission leadership expressed interest in utilizing traditional justice models of dispute resolution in cooperation with traditional institutions.

Finally, the KSPC faces many of the same funding headaches as its counterparts in Plateau and Adamawa States. The commission’s budget framework took more than a year to work out, and the government has promised to provide funding only for salaries and basic supplies. A small budget was approved, but the money arrived only late in 2018. Thus, the KSPC has had almost no money for programs or interventions except for a small grant from the Ford Foundation. The commission hopes to receive additional funding from international donors and expects to continue receiving basic funding from the state, but without more ambitious state funding, it will continue to face constraints on its activities.

Adamawa State Agency for Peace

In operation from 2018 to 2019, the Adamawa State Agency for Peace, Reconciliation and Reconstruction built a promising track record in a short period of time. The agency was modeled somewhat on the KSPC but had a director general heading it instead of a chair. Like the PPBA and the KSPC, the Adamawa agency was devised to be run by twenty to twenty-five civil service staff seconded from other agencies (though in practice they too did not necessarily have backgrounds or training in conflict resolution or peacebuilding methods). Unlike the PPBA and the KSPC, however, the Adamawa agency lacked enabling state legislation, so it existed merely as a gubernatorial initiative of then Governor Bindo Jibrilla. Consequently, when a new governor, Ahmadu Fintiri, unseated Jibrilla in 2019, he soon suspended the agency’s operations and initiated a review. In 2020, Governor Fintiri introduced enabling legislation that restructured the agency as a commission with a larger board and appointed three commissioners to run it along with a CEO (who replaced the agency’s director general). The state assembly passed the legislation with several amendments, and the governor was expected to sign it into law in 2021.

The Adamawa peace agency instituted an important innovation shortly after its inception. All Nigerian states have traditional ruler systems that date from the pre-colonial polities that once governed territories across the country and that were absorbed into the colonial government by British indirect rule. Because of how deeply they are embedded in the culture and present in the communities, many of the traditional rulers nationwide are more respected than formal government agencies and have their fingers on the pulse of what is happening in their communities. In recognition of their influence, the agency cooperated with traditional leaders to set up an early warning and early response system through which the rulers and their subordinates could report possible threats to peace. The system provided them with a template of possible conflict circumstances or crises to report and government contacts to approach as crises unfolded. The reporting tools included ones that illiterate or semiliterate participants could use, thus opening the door to much wider use in a population educated informally. With the help of Search for Common Ground,



A boy rides his bicycle past election posters in Yola, the capital city of Adamawa State, on February 26, 2019. An early focus of the Adamawa peace agency has been to prevent election-related violence. (Photo by Nyancho NwaNri/Reuters)

the agency added community-level dialogue platforms in seven of the state's most conflict-prone LGAs to engage stakeholders and to be able to respond quickly when warning signs arose.

Search for Common Ground also helped the agency set up a statewide dialogue platform, chaired by the agency, that met once a month and brought together representatives from the community dialogue platforms, along with traditional rulers, government officials, religious leaders, women and youth leaders, trade unionists, and business professionals, to review concerns and develop action plans in response. Members of the network were trained by Search for Common Ground in basic mediation and conflict resolution practices, and a ten-year peace-building road map was developed for the agency. In addition, the agency worked with the Danish Refugee Council and local peace NGOs to mediate conflicts between farmers and herders in the northern part of the state.

USIP worked with the Adamawa agency to augment its own efforts to prevent violence during the 2019 general elections by setting up a committee of influential individuals to mediate behind the scenes with key election protagonists and by developing and implementing an action plan with the agency's key civil society partners for peaceful elections. Local politicians were asked to commit to taking election disputes to the tribunals and to keeping their supporters from

engaging in violence. These efforts were backed up by a situation room that housed an internet- and telephone-based system built by the United Nations Development Programme and Search for Common Ground that allowed the public to report early warning information for prompt action.

Challenges Facing Nigeria's Young Peace Agencies

All three of Nigeria's state-level peacebuilding entities face an existential challenge: Will they outlast the governors who created them? The Plateau agency, for example, is so strongly identified in the public's mind as an initiative of Governor Lalong that staff and civil society partners are concerned that if the opposition wins the 2023 election, Lalong's successor will starve the agency or allow it to wither on the bureaucratic vine. Nigerian governors have shown a tendency to discontinue or starve initiatives established by their predecessors, preferring to put their own stamp on government agencies. Governor Fintiri's suspension of the Adamawa peace agency in late 2019 followed this familiar pattern, but hope remains that he will sign legislation passed by the state legislature in 2020 that relaunched the agency as a peace commission.

But even if the entities persist, they face several major challenges to being able to marshal the resources, skills, and independent authority necessary to do the daily work of peacemaking, building relationships, and moving conflict resolution processes forward. These challenges include establishing their reputations for institutional independence and impartiality, securing adequate and dependable funding sources, bolstering their ability to convene conflict parties and relevant government and civil society stakeholders, fostering local peace initiatives, partnering with police and security forces during crisis situations, and continuing to make progress in involving underrepresented groups (particularly women and youth) in local peacebuilding initiatives.

INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

The PPBA's difficulty in establishing a reputation for impartiality in districts with large numbers of opponents to the governor underscores the problems that can arise when the peacebuilding unit is placed administratively within the office of the governor, especially in a polarized state like Plateau. This arrangement puts the agency's director and its staff in the untenable position of being part of the governor's team, and thus obliged to support the governor's political agenda, while trying to distance the agency somewhat in order to gain the trust of communities where the opposition is dominant. Locating a peace agency in the office of the governor is, however, advantageous for achieving less contentious goals, such as the development and adoption of peace education curricula by state schools, building peace and mediation units and restorative justice processes in local governments, conducting anti-violence campaigns in the media, and conducting peace and conflict resolution training. The PPBA has been able to make some progress on most of these efforts because of its placement in the governor's office. Having top-level support is also useful in ironing out interagency struggles. A governor's direct intervention in hot disputes, however, can be expected to move the impartiality question to center stage.

The KSPC's structure seems to have addressed the impartiality concern by making the commission a freestanding unit outside the office of the governor, although the arrangement is somewhat ambiguous because the KSPC technically reports to both the governor and the SSG, and the lines of separation remain largely untested. The factor likely most important to preserving the KSPC's impartiality may be its commission structure, which allows members other than the director general to be in public leadership positions. Thus, the commission can incorporate a diverse array of individuals from different sides of the state's political, ethnic, and religious divides, offering it more opportunities to demonstrate that it represents opposing points of view, which inspires trust.

An additional benefit of the KSPC's commission structure is that it allows the appointment of highly influential members by the governor. Prominent individuals such as Bishop Idowu-Fearon have sufficient clout to stand outside the governor's shadow and to engage parties the executive branch may find it uncomfortable to deal with. Moreover, the commitments of such individuals to their primary professions mean they typically are unable to lead peace units full-time but can be flexibly engaged by the commission on a mutually agreeable, as-needed basis. The committee structure also allows for a prominent chairperson, who is insulated structurally from the governor's chain of command, to serve as face of the commission to the public and the media, while the director general (who is also appointed by the governor) focuses on day-to-day peacebuilding operations out of the media's glare.

SUFFICIENT AND DEPENDABLE FUNDING

All three peacebuilding bodies reported facing severe budgetary constraints that limit their ability to exercise their mandates. Beyond the salaries of their staff, the peace institutions receive little financial support from their state governments. This financial precarity has left them largely unable to conduct interventions or to respond to crises in real time, much less to address their other organizational responsibilities as comprehensively as they would wish. All three institutions have received a substantial amount of international donor support, which has allowed them to conduct some basic interventions, usually in the form of community dialogues. All three institutions also have in common a lack of fully competent technical staff able to carry out conflict resolution and peacebuilding work. Without budgets to hire experts, they remain hobbled in their ability to do this work. The arrival of COVID-19 in 2020 further strained government coffers, leaving even less available for budget requests.

Partially offsetting their inadequate funding from the state, all three peace institutions enjoy the support of robust local CSO networks and global NGOs, which together have provided critical technical support. The technical leadership in all three institutions was recruited from CSOs, and many of their key initiatives were inherited from or developed by NGOs. A major concern for the future, however, is that the peace agencies, commissions, and CSOs will be competing for the same donor funds for peacebuilding.

CONVENING POWER

The convening power of the peace institutions was mentioned by many NGO respondents as their most important potential attribute, and as such should be bolstered as much as possible. The peace institutions function not only as a bridge between government and civil society but as an important focal point for organizing peace initiatives and improving the efficacy of such efforts. Some

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interviewees complained that the institutions put all their energy into organizing meetings and then did not follow up with interventions or actions, but this perception at least underscores the great potential government peace agencies have as conveners and organizers of peace coalitions or initiatives.

All three entities hope to continue to work with civil society and, in Adamawa's case, with traditional institutions to build early warning and early response systems with their civil so-

ciety networks. Doing so would be an important outcome of their convening power and would open up more possibilities for demonstrating impartiality. Simply because an agency or commission takes the lead in convening organizations for a meeting does not mean that it must *lead* the intervention. Instead, CSOs with peace and conflict resolution expertise can take the lead, especially in highly polarized circumstances where the government is perceived to be biased toward one side of the dispute. The peace institutions can work as "honest brokers" to make sure that CSOs from all sides of the conflict are engaged in ethnically, religiously, and politically balanced leadership teams and that the process overall is moving forward, while the CSOs, some of which have advanced skills and capacities in this work, can undertake the specifics of the intervention. This partnership approach can also help address the lack of skilled conflict resolution staff in the institutions.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

All three peace institutions focus on fostering conflict resolution units in the local governments of their states. Because of their proximity to the neighborhoods and villages where conflicts typically ignite, local governments are in a better position to address flare-ups at the source, if they are properly trained and supported. Local government initiatives may also have greater potential for preventing violent conflicts from breaking out, assuming local officials are in touch with communities. At the same time, local governments face the same impartiality concerns as state governments, in that LGA chairs and counselors may also be interested parties in disputes. Consequently, although peace committees are important starting points, the state peace agencies may have more impact over time by fostering mediation and restorative justice services through the local governments, helping to diffuse community tensions at the root.

Adamawa's innovative engagement of the traditional institutions also points to an important ally for the state peace institutions. Although many of the traditional rulers are financially bound to the governor and state government, they still enjoy great influence in their communities and can be important peacemakers. Others may be key proponents or instigators of conflict and violence. Engaging them makes sense either way, whereas leaving them out of peace negotiations creates greater incentives for them to act as spoilers. The KSPC's engagement of the state's Interfaith Bureau points to another group of critical allies, religious leaders, whose participation in early warning systems, local peace interventions, and other initiatives could greatly enhance the institutions' impact, and also serve as a model for other states.

At the federal level, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution was intended to function for national conflicts much like the state peace institutions do for local conflicts. Like the state institutions, it has been chronically underfunded and dependent on international donors for

assistance, but with donor support it has conducted multiple conflict assessments and skills training sessions around the nation over the years. The IPCR is an important resource for the state institutions. As described above, it is a member of the KSPC's technical advisory group. It also has undertaken several training segments for the PPBA, funded by the Economic Community of West African States, and has also assisted the PPBA on several initiatives. The IPCR could thus provide important research and training support for state institutions nationwide by helping to fill some of their capacity gaps until they are able to stand on their own.

PARTNERING WITH POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES

The security forces overall remain problematic partners for the state peace institutions. Respondents in both civil society and government raised concerns about the unreliability of the police especially, but also had questions about the military, other security forces, and the judiciary. The persistence of widespread impunity was cited as a major driver of conflict across Nigeria, and corruption in the security forces and the judiciary was identified as a key factor behind this impunity. Nonetheless, peace institutions need to coordinate with the security forces, especially in crisis situations, and the police could benefit from training modules that these institutions should be able to offer in the future. Yet the animosity with which the security forces are viewed in many communities means that peace institutions in some circumstances cannot afford to be confused, or seen to be allied, with them.

The issue arose most often in regard to the question of whether a peace institution should sit on its state's security council. In order to foster greater cooperation, security councils typically have representation from all the security agencies and the governor's office. Reflecting their organizational structure, leaders of the PPBA generally felt that the agency would be more effective sitting on both the state's Security Council and the Executive Council, while the KSPC leadership preferred to stay off both in order to preserve the commission's impartiality. KSPC leaders did see joining the Security Council as a possibility, however, once the commission's early warning system is up and running.

OUTREACH TO THE OVERLOOKED

All three peace institutions have made special efforts to engage women and youth in their programming, and the PPBA has language to that effect in its mandate from the legislature. The Kaduna and Plateau organizations both make gender balance a priority in outreach, training, and interventions, and have conducted specific training modules for women and youth. The PPBA, for instance, has held dialogues with the Plateau Youth Council and with the youth wing of the Coalition of Ethnic Nationalities on the Plateau.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A consideration of the next steps for Nigeria's state-level peace institutions suggests that two conditions are unlikely to change. First, funding is likely to continue to be a major problem, such that relying on international donors will continue well into the future. Second, the states that currently have peace agencies or commissions, and many of the states that are considering establishing them, will remain polarized political environments for years to come. Thus, long-term

strategies will be needed that both address the roots of the conflict and build trust in the peace institutions. In light of these conditions, several possibilities for growing and strengthening the peace institutions present themselves.

Build trust by strengthening institutional independence. It is critically important to secure the independence and impartiality of the peace institutions. This is particularly true for the PPBA, but the restructured Adamawa commission may face similar concerns. The KSPC has been more successful at maintaining its reputation for impartiality and simply needs to stay the course and continue to make protecting this reputation a priority, especially as it approaches the end of its five-year mandate in 2022 and the question of its renewal comes up.

Separate less polarized peacebuilding efforts from more politically charged work. The intervention mandates of the PPBA and the KSPC are their most controversial functions. Much could be gained if these mandates were separated from the institutions' less political work. The KSPC's evolving division of labor between the commissioners and the executive vice chairman offers some guidance in this regard, suggesting a number of possibilities for other states considering peace agencies or commissions.

Structurally, having a separate board or unit to handle intervention activities would allow the organizations to compartmentalize their functions, with highly political activities assigned to one arm of the organization and a separate arm freed up to work on less contentious issues. The PPBA, for instance, could add an advisory board of prominent individuals to pursue political engagement without amending its statute.

Alternatively, the responsibilities of a peace institution could be divided, with the agency focusing on intervention and peacebuilding issues and a separate special adviser focusing on less controversial matters such as peace education curricula in the schools, alternative dispute resolution, and restorative justice programming for local governments. However, this option would run the risk of increasing interagency strife over the division of responsibilities and enhancing budget concerns, and so would require clear lines of responsibility and focused coordination efforts. Conversely, the peace institution could retain peace education and the development of alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice systems at the local level as part of its mission while ceding the highly political peacemaking work to other government actors, such as a special adviser for peace activities. This approach would also allow the agency to focus on its convening and coordinating role while encouraging others to conduct the interventions.

To further ensure a clear separation of the more politically polarized interventions from their less controversial activities, peace institutions could name special peace teams or committees comprising prominent individuals that represent all the key parties to the conflict to mediate specific conflicts on their behalf. These ad hoc committees would report to the agency but work directly with the disputing communities for a finite period of time. In a similar fashion, agencies or commissions could name civil society groups, or committees of such groups, as the lead facilitators to run peace processes and interventions in major disputes. This approach could also work well in tandem with the ad hoc committees of prominent individuals, providing key technical assistance and program work and reinforcing the convening role of the state-level peace agencies.

Promote balanced interagency cooperation. With respect to dispute settlement, two or more state peace institutions could collaborate in efforts to mitigate highly polarized cross-border conflicts, such as the farmer-herder conflict. The collaboration between the local governments of Riyom in Plateau State and Kaura in Kaduna State fostered by the PPBA and KSPC provides a model in this regard. Because of the common problems these institutions share, they, along with the Adamawa agency, should stay in regular contact to help each other troubleshoot and to learn together over time, perhaps through annual summit meetings in addition to ad hoc communications.

The KSPC also appears to have struck the right balance for impartiality by staying off both the Kaduna State Executive Council and the Security Council for the time being. Although meeting with both bodies would definitely be helpful for improving interagency coordination and information sharing, none of the peace institutions currently has much of a rapid response capacity that would benefit from having a regular presence on these councils. Ad hoc meetings with these bodies on key conflict issues as needed will likely suffice during the critical early years while the peace institutions and their early warning systems are being established.

Pursue financial stability. Financial stability is key to the ongoing activities of the state peace institutions. In addition to helping underwrite programming needs, improved financing would allow them to hire peace and conflict resolution experts, which would help address capacity concerns. Even in the context of uncertain gubernatorial support, several options remain. Perhaps most important, the peace institutions should be direct (first) lines for funding in the state budgets, so that they receive their allotments directly from the state accounts (once approved by the legislature and the governor) instead of having to send funding requests through the Ministry of Finance or some other entity. Direct funding would prevent intermediary units from withholding funds or delaying disbursement for political reasons, as has happened to the PPBA.

Partnering with CSOs should increase the attractiveness of state peace institutions' funding proposals to international donors because of the greater impact potential. The agencies could also work together and with the IPCR to push harder for federal assistance from the National Assembly, making the case collectively for their impact on peace nationwide.

Explore public-private financing models. The addition of influential businesspeople and donor representatives to the agencies' leadership teams or advisory boards could expand their network of potential funding sources. Several respondents expected that the involvement of spouses of current and former governors, for example, would be extremely helpful in opening doors and attracting new support for an agency's work. Care would be needed to maintain a political and ethnic balance in appointments to the commissions themselves. It might be more helpful to create separate advisory boards for fundraising in order to avoid direct connections to the peace institution's leadership structure.

A public-private model to help underwrite the agencies along the lines of the Lagos State Security Trust Fund or a community cooperative financial model should be considered (although the Lagos fund may not provide a model that works beyond Lagos and its deep business infrastructure). The PPBA has been examining similar models to determine whether some variation might work in Plateau State. As well, local governments could be asked to contribute from their budgets to a peace intervention or training fund. Local businesses and community associations, which sometimes have their own security services, could also be approached to contribute.

Improve training in conflict resolution. As young institutions, Nigeria’s state-level peace institutions would benefit from additional training and expert advice in peace and conflict resolution work, especially for the seconded staff with no background in this area. In addition to basic mediation and facilitation skills, all the institutions expressed the need for training in conflict analysis, restorative justice, monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessments. All are working to build their own early warning and early response systems, which require a great deal of technical skill and electronic infrastructure to maintain.

Ensure continuity. The state peace agencies can do little to address their continuity concerns beyond reaching out to state legislators to keep them informed of their activities and inviting them to conferences and monthly roundtables. Nigeria’s state legislatures tend to experience heavy turnover every election cycle, so legislative champions can be short-lived. Nevertheless, the engagement of key committee leaders and the Speaker of the House, as well as leading opposition members, would help them learn about the work of the peace institutions and understand their impact. Building the civil society coalitions recommended above would also help create constituencies that support the peace institutions and could advocate for their importance after each change of administration. Such coalitions will be particularly important in encouraging the Adamawa governor to sign legislation to launch the restructured commission there. States that are considering starting their own peace agencies or commissions should also consider the close involvement of legislators and CSOs from the outset in order to build these coalitions of support and increase the likelihood of continuity.



These young peace agencies have made clear strides toward organizing improved initiatives to quell religious, ethnic, and farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria’s troubled Middle Belt region. Resolution of the impartiality, funding, and continuity issues they face would help them be even more effective in the future. Other states across Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa would benefit from setting up similar units and should pay close attention to the experiences of these three organizations; the latter, in turn, can play a key advisory role for the other states.

Notes

1. See, for example, Susan Jeghelian, Madhawa Palihapitiya, and Kaila Eisenkraft, “Legislative Study: A Framework to Strengthen Massachusetts Community Mediation as a Cost-Effective Public Service,” Paper no. 1, Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration Publications, November 1, 2011, http://scholarworks.umb.edu/mopc_pubs/1; and Andries Odendaal, *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013).
2. Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).
3. See, for example, Yahaya T. Baba, “Executive Dominance and Hyper-Presidentialism in Nigeria,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics*, ed. Carl Levan and Patrick Ukata (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Darren Kew, “An Independent Evaluation of the National Endowment of Democracy’s Grants Program in Nigeria 2012–2017,” National Endowment for Democracy, 2018.
4. Lagos, Ogun, and Rivers States are exceptions to this rule. See BudgIT, “State of States: The Revised 2020 Edition,” November 2019, www.yourbudgit.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/State-of-States-2020-Revised-Edition.pdf.
5. B. S. Meyer, *Beyond Neutrality: Confronting the Crisis in Conflict Resolution* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).
6. Plateau Peace Building Agency, “Final Report of the Baseline/Institutional Capacity Assessment of the Plateau Peace Building Agency,” October 15, 2018.
7. The Network of Nigerian Facilitators is a network of expert facilitators who conduct peace interventions in hot spots nationwide and assist each other and local peacemakers in such efforts. Justice and Security Dialogues are initiatives supported by the United States Institute of Peace in Burma, Iraq, Nepal, Yemen, and several countries in Africa that bring local security forces, particularly the police, together with community, civic, and NGO leaders to build trust and develop local strategies to address community security concerns.
8. Across Nigeria’s Middle Belt, violent conflicts have increased in recent years between herders, who are predominantly Muslim, and farmers, who are often but not always Christian, over passage and grazing rights and increased criminality. See Chris Kwaja and Bukola Ademola-Adelehin, “Seeking Security and Stability: An Analysis of Security Responses to Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria,” Search for Common Ground, November 2018, www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Seeking-Security-and-Stability_Nigeria_-Search-for-Common-Ground.pdf.
9. At the time of publication, the Plateau Peace Building Agency was searching for funding to support restorative justice systems or pilots in at least five of the most troubled local governments in Plateau State.
10. See Howard Zehr, *The Little Handbook of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002).
11. The Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance brought together senior political, academic, and civil society leaders from around Nigeria to give advice and advance ideas to policymakers and civic actors on important peace matters nationwide. See United States Institute of Peace, “Nigerian Civic Leaders Assert a Role against Violence,” October 12, 2017, www.usip.org/publications/2017/10/nigerian-civic-leaders-assert-role-against-violence.

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