

# COMMUNICATION AND POST CONFLICT REINTEGRATION OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE.

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## Abstract

This study investigated the role of communication in the post-conflict reintegration of ethno-religious communities in Jos North Local Government Area between 2015 and 2024. Using a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from questionnaires and Key Informant Interviewees to explore how communication shaped trust, reconciliation, and coexistence among formerly divided groups. The findings shows that communication significantly influenced reintegration, with dialogue forums, peace-oriented media programmes, religious messages, and interpersonal interactions enhancing understanding, reducing hostility, and promoting forgiveness between Christians and Muslims. The study also established that poorly managed communication such as media bias, misinformation, political manipulation, and unclear government messaging contributed to renewed mistrust and tensions. Structural challenges, including limited access to communication channels, inadequate funding for community media, illiteracy, and language barriers, were identified as major obstacles to effective peace communication. Therefore, the study concludes that communication has been more constructive than harmful and remains an indispensable pillar of post-conflict reintegration in Jos North. The study recommended that community dialogue forums should be institutionalized and conducted regularly, rather than only during crises, to sustain trust building, deepen understanding, and strengthen long-term peaceful coexistence.

**Key words: Reintegration, Ethno-Religious communities, Social fragmentation and Conflicts**

## Introduction

Ethno-religious conflict has remained one of the most persistent challenges to peace and development in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. For about two decades now, Jos North Local Government Area has witnessed recurrent outbreaks of violence that have led to displacements, loss of lives and property, economic stagnation, and deep social fragmentation. While relative calm has been observed in certain periods between 2015 and today, the scars of past violence continue to shape everyday relations. Communities remain largely segregated along religious and ethnic lines, and trust among groups has been severely eroded. Reintegration of displaced persons and the rebuilding of intercommunal harmony therefore remain critical tasks.

Communication is central to these processes because it mediates how groups perceive one another, how grievances are expressed, and how reconciliation initiatives are received. In many instances, poor communication has fueled suspicion,

misinformation and hostility, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence. For example, inflammatory media reports, rumour mongering and hate\biased narratives have at times deepened divisions and fuelled stereotypes. Conversely, deliberate and constructive communication, such as interfaith dialogues, peace messaging through deliberate peace reporting and grassroots mediation, has demonstrated potential to build bridges and encourage coexistence. The paradox is that communication in Jos North has served both as a tool for peace and as an instrument for conflict escalation.

Despite its significance, there remains very scanty research on how communication practices influence post conflict reintegration of ethno-religious communities in Jos North from 2001 to date. Most existing studies on the Jos crises emphasize the historical roots of the conflict, patterns of violence, and the role of political and economic factors. While these are important, they often pay insufficient attention to the communicative processes through which reintegration either succeeds or fails. As a result, policymakers and peace practitioners lack clear empirical evidence on which forms of communication most effectively rebuild trust and encourage displaced persons to return and resettle in formerly hostile neighborhoods.

The problem is further compounded by the persistence of structural challenges. Residential segregation has reduced opportunities for intergroup interaction, thereby limiting the natural channels of everyday communication that ordinarily promote social cohesion. Peace institutions such as the Plateau Peace Building Agency have initiated dialogue platforms, but their reach and sustainability remain uncertain. Faith based organizations and community leaders have attempted to use sermons, meetings, and media campaigns to address divisions, yet their impact varies and is sometimes undermined by politicization. Without clear insights into which communication strategies work best in fostering reintegration, efforts risk being fragmented, inconsistent, or ineffective.

In addition, 2015 to 2024 has been marked by changing dynamics of violence and reintegration. The rise of social media and mobile communication has altered how narratives spread within Jos North, enabling both rapid rumour circulation and opportunities for digital peace messaging. However, the balance between these positive and negative uses of communication has not been adequately studied. Similarly, reintegration efforts have faced setbacks due to lingering grievances, contested indigene-settler identities, and economic exclusion. These challenges raise critical questions about the role communication plays in either overcoming or entrenching these obstacles.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies across disparate post conflict contexts show that communication plays a central role in shaping reintegration outcomes by influencing social norms expectations

and the atmosphere of trust. In Rwanda a year-long radio drama that embedded reconciliation narratives led listeners to change perceptions of what others considered normal behaviour and lowered prejudice even when factual beliefs about events remained unchanged (Paluck, 2009). That randomized field experiment demonstrates how media content that models intergroup cooperation and public endorsement of tolerant norms can shift social expectations and thereby create an enabling environment for reintegration. The implication for community level reintegration is clear. Carefully designed communication interventions can alter normative landscapes so that formerly estranged groups find it more acceptable to re-engage with one another.

Studies point to comparable patterns where community level dialogue and mediated programming supported reintegration by making public the conditions and commitments necessary for return and coexistence. Community radios in Liberia and Sierra Leone shows that local radio programming that combined listener participation with problem solving forums helped to normalize joint community action and to amplify voices of reconciliation that would otherwise remain marginal (Comminit case studies, 2013). Similarly in parts of Nigeria. studies indicate that community radio and locally produced programming have helped to coordinate return processes and to reassure displaced persons about safety and services when these media worked in concert with local leaders and civil society groups (Nyatuame, 2023; Nnah, 2022). These empirical accounts emphasize that media are effective when they are locally rooted and when their messages are linked to concrete actions that audiences can verify.

Apart from traditional media, the rise of social media and mobile communication has altered reintegration dynamics by accelerating both rumour circulation and corrective information. Studies on rumour mongering and verification in Nigerian conflict zones shows that unverified messages transmitted on social platforms have frequently inflamed local tensions but that the same platforms can also be mobilized by journalists civic groups and authorities to dispel false claims and coordinate rapid responses (Data Journalism Handbook case study on Nigeria; Owens Ibie, 2024). Empirical evidence therefore suggests a dual role. Communication technologies can degrade reintegration prospects when used to spread fear but can also support reintegration when used to increase transparency coordinate services and enable two way engagement between communities and institutions.

Studies that examine reintegration of former fighters and displaced populations further show that communication is both instrumental and symbolic. Research on reintegration in Nigeria documents that community acceptance often hinges on visible public processes such as apologies public ceremonies and open dialogues that are communicated widely and perceived as credible by multiple audiences (Ike et al., 2022; Brechenmacher, 2018). Where communication accompanies economic and security measures with credible storytelling about change and accountability reintegration is more

durable. Conversely where communication is absent or perceived as propaganda reintegration falters.

Several empirical strands point to the relative effectiveness of particular forms of communication for trust building. First participatory media formats such as community radio talk shows listener call in segments and locally scripted radio drama provide spaces for ordinary citizens to voice grievances hear others and witness negotiated solutions; this participatory quality appears crucial in producing sustainable attitudinal change (Paluck, 2009; Comminit case studies). In Nigeria empirical work on community radio programming shows that stations that facilitate intercommunal forums and feature local religious and traditional leaders can break down fear and create new narratives of cooperation especially when broadcasts are in local languages and reflect local concerns (Nyatuame, 2023; Nnah, 2022).

Second interpersonal and face to face communication through community dialogues mediated by trusted local actors continues to be indispensable. Evaluation reports from community dialogue projects in north central Nigeria showed that mediated dialogues which include structured listening exercises joint problem solving and clear follow up actions significantly improved attitudes between groups and reduced immediate triggers for violence (Mercy Corps, 2024; Eke, 2020). These dialogues succeed when local ownership is clear and when communication is supported by tangible steps such as restoring access to markets or schools that demonstrate reciprocity and reinforce trust.

Third structured mass media interventions that use narrative techniques can shift social norms at scale. Again, the Rwanda radio drama experiment is instructive because it used relatable characters and repeated story arcs to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and the social costs of continuing prejudice (Paluck, 2009). Subsequent work has shown that similar narrative-based formats can be adapted to other contexts provided they are grounded in local realities and accompanied by community engagement that helps translate normative shifts into practical outcomes (Paluck, 2009; Staub & Pearlman, 2009). The empirical lesson is that narrative media work best when paired with local validation and opportunities for listeners to act on new expectations.

Fourth hybrid strategies that combine digital tools with community centric formats are emerging as promising. Evaluations of verification and rumour countering initiatives in Nigeria show that using social media to amplify community radio programming or to push verified updates during flare ups improves response time and reduces the spread of inflammatory content (Data Journalism Handbook Nigeria case; Uwalaka, 2022). Practitioners report that using multiple channels ensures redundancy so that accurate messages reach different demographic groups. Empirical experience thus

supports a layered communication approach that mixes interpersonal mediated and digital channels adapted to local trust ecologies.

Empirical studies demonstrate unequivocally that communication can inflame tensions and contribute to renewed conflict when content, channels or messengers are biased or unaccountable. Research on media framing of communal violence in Nigeria shows that sensationalist reporting selective sourcing and inflammatory headlines can harden group boundaries and escalate public outrage (Abdullahi, 2024). When journalists emphasize revenge narratives or present events without contextualization audiences are more likely to view the other side as a permanent threat rather than as negotiable partners. This dynamic is particularly dangerous in contexts like Jos North where existing grievances are salient.

Social media and rumour mongering amplify this risk. Several empirical analyses of Nigerian incidents show how unverified content on WhatsApp Facebook and Twitter has circulated rapidly and led to on the ground violence before corrections could be issued (Uwalaka, 2022). In some cases false alarms about attacks or the movement of armed groups produced panic driven mobilization and retaliatory killings. Studies highlight that the velocity and closed group structures of messaging apps make rumour governance especially challenging and that delayed official communication often leaves a vacuum that rumours fill.

Another way communication contributes to division is through elite manipulation. Studies on communal violence in Nigeria shows that political actors and local elites sometimes instrumentalize media and religious platforms to mobilize supporters or to delegitimize rivals (Ezeanucha, 2020; Brechenmacher, 2018). When influential figures use narratives of historical grievance or invoke identity cues for political gain they can rapidly transform local disputes into widespread confrontation. The empirical record suggests that accountability for inflammatory public speech remains a gap in many post conflict settings and that media literacy and standards enforcement are uneven.

Finally poor design of peace-oriented communication can backfire. Studies of externally driven reconciliation campaigns indicate that when messages are top down, ignore local power dynamics or promise benefits that are not delivered, communities become cynical and may reject subsequent reintegration offers (Popoola, 2020; Flat Pack Reintegration critique, 2024). Empirical evaluations repeatedly find that communication without matching policy action or community involvement can delegitimize peace actors. For Jos North this implies that communication strategies must be honest about capabilities and must be linked to credible follow up in order not to worsen mistrust.

Research highlights a set of structural and operational challenges that constrain communication for reintegration. First resource limitations at local media outlets and

community organizations reduce the capacity to produce sustained high-quality programming or to monitor misinformation effectively. Case studies of community radio in West Africa and Nigeria show that stations often operate on shoestring budgets and cannot maintain continuous programming or verification desks (Comminit case studies; Nyatuame, 2023). This limits the reach and reliability of peace-oriented messaging. A practical response is investment in local media capacity training and funding models that prioritize long term stability over short term projects.

Second governance and trust deficits impede the effectiveness of official communication. Empirical studies of reintegration in Nigeria reveal that communities often distrust government messages because of prior failures to deliver security or services (Ike et al., 2022; Brechenmacher, 2018). This credibility gap makes rumor more believable than official statements. Strategies to address this include leveraging trusted intermediaries such as faith leaders and respected traditional authorities to co deliver messages, and instituting transparent feedback loops so communities can verify and hold institutions accountable.

Third technological challenges and digital divides complicate both the spread and correction of information. While social media can be used to counter false narratives, unequal access means some groups remain reliant on oral networks where rumours travel quickly (Data Journalism Handbook Nigeria case; Uwalaka, 2022). Therefore, hybrid strategies that combine digital verification with community outreach are recommended. Establishing rapid response verification teams that work with local radio and community groups to publish timely corrections in accessible formats has shown empirical promise in reducing escalation.

Fourth political economy factors including elite capture of messaging and the instrumentalization of identity remain persistent barriers. Studies find that unless broader political incentives are aligned with reintegration goals communication alone will have limited effect (Popoola, 2020; Abdullahi, 2024). Practical strategies therefore require coupling communication efforts with concrete policy measures such as equitable resource distribution security guarantees and community level development projects. Empirical program evaluations suggest that communication works best when it is part of an integrated approach that combines messaging with visible and sustained improvements in people s daily lives.

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The choice of this design is informed by the nature of the study, which seeks to collect and analyze data from a large number of respondents in order to understand patterns, perceptions, and experiences of communication in relation to post conflict reintegration. The descriptive survey design is appropriate because it enables the study to obtain quantitative and qualitative data that describe the current state of communication practices, their influence on reintegration,

and the challenges encountered within ethno-religious communities of Jos North Local Government Area.

The target population for this study comprises community members, religious leaders, traditional leaders, civil society representatives, and media practitioners residing in Jos North Local Government Area between 2015 and 2024. These groups are central actors in post conflict reintegration processes and have direct experiences with the use of communication to promote peace, trust, and reconciliation. Given the diverse ethno-religious composition of Jos North, the study ensures that both Christian and Muslim communities are adequately represented. The sample size is determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, with a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 5 percent. From this calculation, a sample of approximately 350 respondents were selected, which is considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalization of findings to the larger population.

A multistage sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents. At the first stage, Jos North Local Government Area was stratified into its major communities to capture geographical spread. For the purpose of this study, ten (10) communities were identified: Angwan Rukuba, Jenta Adamu, Apata, Alheri, Tudun Wada, Bauchi Road, Angwan Rogo, Gangare, Naraguta, and Ali Kazaure. Within each stratum, purposive sampling was used to identify key stakeholders such as religious and traditional leaders, civil society actors, and media practitioners who play prominent roles in reintegration processes. Simple random sampling was applied to select community members from each stratum in order to avoid bias and ensure that every individual has an equal chance of being included. This combination of purposive and random sampling techniques is appropriate because it balances the need to target relevant actors while maintaining representativeness across the ethno-religious spectrum.

Primary data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires and semi structured interviews. The questionnaire consists of both closed ended and open-ended items designed to capture respondents' perceptions of how communication has influenced reintegration, the forms of communication that promote trust, and the challenges that undermine effectiveness. The semi structured interviews were conducted with religious leaders, traditional leaders, and media practitioners to elicit in depth qualitative insights into the role of communication in the reintegration process. Secondary data was sourced from relevant reports, government documents, and scholarly studies on conflict and reintegration in Nigeria. The use of multiple data collection methods enables triangulation, thereby increasing the validity of the findings.

To ensure validity, the instruments was subjected to face and content validation. Draft copies of the questionnaire and interview guide was presented to experts in peace and conflict studies, communication, and research methodology for review. Their

suggestions and corrections were incorporated to refine the instruments. Content validity was established by aligning the items with the study's research questions and objectives.

The data collected was presented and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, which helped summarize and present the patterns in the data. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, thematically analyzed, and presented in narrative form with verbatim quotes from respondents to capture diverse perspectives. Tables, charts, and graphs were used to visually present the findings for clarity and ease of interpretation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Here the study presents the findings of the study based on data collected from respondents across 10 communities in Jos North Local Government Area. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 320 were completed, retrieved and used for analysis, in addition to insights from 12 key informant interviewees. The results were analyzed according to the research questions earlier formulated, with quantitative findings presented first, followed by qualitative narratives from interview participants to deepen interpretation.

The findings for Research Question One indicate that communication has significantly influenced post-conflict reintegration among ethno-religious communities in Jos North. Quantitative results show that the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that communication improved understanding between Christians and Muslims, reduced hostility, restored trust, and enhanced the overall reintegration process. Interview responses further highlight that dialogue sessions, media programs, and interpersonal communication fostered collaboration and positive engagement among community members. This finding aligns with empirical studies in other post-conflict contexts. In Rwanda, a year-long radio drama embedded with reconciliation narratives influenced perceptions of normative behavior and reduced prejudice, demonstrating how media can create an enabling environment for reintegration (Paluck, 2009). Similarly, community dialogue and mediated programming in Liberia and Sierra Leone normalized joint community action and amplified voices of reconciliation that would otherwise remain marginalized (Comminit case studies, 2013). The Jos North experience reflects these patterns, showing that carefully structured communication interventions can alter attitudes, rebuild trust, and encourage cooperative behaviors. This confirms that communication is not only an informational tool but also a normative mechanism shaping social expectations in post-conflict societies.

Research Question Two examined the forms of communication that contribute positively to trust building and reconciliation. The study found that community dialogue meetings and messages from religious leaders were highly effective in promoting forgiveness and tolerance. Radio and television programs extended the reach of peace messages, while interpersonal communication allowed for conflict resolution at the individual level. Social media was recognized as useful for reconciliation when used responsibly, though concerns about misinformation reduced its perceived effectiveness. These results resonate with literature emphasizing participatory and interpersonal communication as critical mechanisms for trust building (Paluck, 2009; Mercy Corps, 2024; Eke, 2020). In Nigeria, community radio programming that facilitates intercommunal forums and features local religious and traditional leaders has been effective in creating new narratives of cooperation (Nyatuame, 2023; Nnah, 2022). The study highlights that hybrid strategies combining digital, traditional, and personal communication channels strengthen intergroup trust and encourage collaborative participation in community initiatives. The empirical implication is that communication for peace is most effective when it is multi-dimensional, contextually grounded, and reinforced by credible community actors.

Findings from Research Question Three reveal that communication can also contribute to misunderstanding, mistrust, and renewed tensions if mismanaged. Respondents identified biased media reporting, unverified social media rumours, unclear government messaging, and manipulation by politicians and elites as sources of fear, suspicion, and intergroup divisions. Interview responses confirmed that sensationalized news, false information, and reinforcement of stereotypes impede reconciliation and slow reintegration. These findings are consistent with literature showing that communication can inflame conflicts when content or delivery is biased, inaccurate, or instrumentalized for political gain (Abdullahi, 2024; Ezeanucha, 2020; Uwalaka, 2022). In Nigerian conflict zones, unverified social media content and elite manipulation have often transformed local disputes into widespread confrontations. The Jos North data underscore the dual nature of communication: it can promote reconciliation, but without transparency, accountability, and responsible dissemination, it can exacerbate divisions. Therefore, effective communication strategies must prioritize accuracy, credibility, and moderation to prevent escalation of tensions.

Research Question Four examined the challenges affecting communication and potential remedies. Respondents reported limited access to reliable communication channels, low trust in government messaging, inadequate funding for community media, literacy and language barriers, and elite manipulation as major obstacles. Strengthening local media platforms and promoting regular community dialogue were suggested as key strategies to address these challenges. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing that structural and institutional constraints often limit the reach and credibility of peace-

oriented communication (Ike et al., 2022; Brechenmacher, 2018; Nyatuame, 2023). Resource limitations at local media outlets, governance deficits, and digital divides reduce the effectiveness of reintegration messaging (Comminit case studies; Uwalaka, 2022). Practical strategies include investing in local media capacity, leveraging trusted community actors to co-deliver messages, implementing hybrid digital and interpersonal approaches, and aligning communication efforts with visible development initiatives (Popoola, 2020; Abdullahi, 2024). The Jos North context demonstrates that overcoming these barriers is critical for ensuring inclusive, credible, and sustainable reintegration efforts that promote long-term stability.

The findings are summarized as follows:

1. The study revealed that communication significantly influenced post conflict reintegration. Majority of respondents agreed that media programs, public dialogue sessions, and interpersonal communication improved understanding between Christians and Muslims, reduced hostility, restored trust, and enhanced the reintegration process. Interview narratives confirmed that dialogue sessions and media programs transformed attitudes and encouraged collaboration among formerly divided groups.
2. The findings indicated that multiple forms of communication played complementary roles in fostering trust and reconciliation. Community dialogue meetings, religious leaders' messages, radio and television programs, interpersonal interactions, and responsibly used social media were all cited as effective. Dialogue sessions and religious messages were particularly impactful in promoting forgiveness, tolerance, and cooperation among ethno religious groups.
3. It was also discovered that communication could contribute negatively to reintegration if poorly managed. Media bias, rumors on social media, lack of clear government messaging, reinforcement of stereotypes, and manipulation by politicians and elites were identified as factors that exacerbate mistrust, fear, and renewed tensions. Interviews highlighted that sensationalized news, misinformation, and political exploitation of communication channels undermine reconciliation efforts.
4. Finally, the study found that structural and social challenges limit the effectiveness of peace communication. Limited access to reliable communication channels, lack of trust in government messages, inadequate funding for community media, illiteracy, and language barriers were identified as major obstacles. Strengthening local media and sustaining regular community dialogues were perceived as key strategies to overcome these challenges and promote inclusive, sustainable communication for reintegration.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the role of communication in the post conflict reintegration of ethno religious communities in Jos North Local Government Area between 2015 and 2024. The findings demonstrate that communication remains a central factor in healing fractured relationships, restoring trust, and rebuilding coexistence in societies affected by violent conflict. The evidence from the data shows that structured dialogue meetings, peace media programs, religious messaging, and interpersonal interactions significantly contributed to breaking barriers of suspicion between Christians and Muslims, encouraging empathy, and promoting forgiveness. These forms of communication helped residents of conflict affected communities view one another not as rivals but as partners in the restoration of peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the study revealed that communication has the potential to escalate tensions when poorly managed. Biased media reports, sensational political speeches, inaccurate information circulating on social media, and messages perceived as favouring one religious group over another were shown to reawaken fear, reinforce stereotypes, and encourage hostility. These negative communication practices occasionally disrupted the peace process and delayed reintegration.

Despite these challenges, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that communication has been more constructive than harmful in the period under review. The continued implementation of community dialogue platforms, sustained peace messaging on radio and television, and active involvement of religious leaders in reconciliation efforts have gradually improved social interaction and joint community activities among formerly divided groups. The demographic findings further show that the most represented age category was the youth and young adults, who are also the most involved in peace campaigns and social media engagements. Their active participation gives greater hope for the longevity of community reintegration. The overall conclusion of the study is that communication has been, and remains, an indispensable pillar of post conflict reintegration in Jos North. Where communication is well structured, inclusive, transparent, and sustained, peace becomes more stable and communities remain stabilized.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance post conflict reintegration through communication:

1. This study recommends that community dialogue forums should be institutionalized rather than treated as emergency interventions during moments of crisis. When residents from different faiths continually engage in dialogue and conflict sensitivity training, stereotypes reduce, empathy increases, and the foundation for long lasting coexistence is strengthened.

2. Government and development partners should increase support for peace media programming. Radio and television programs that promote peace should be regularly aired in local languages and designed to include youth and women, who are major communication carriers within neighbourhoods. This will ensure that positive messages penetrate deeply into communities.
3. Religious leaders should receive continuous training in conflict sensitive communication since their sermons and messages influence large populations. When religious communication consistently emphasizes tolerance, forgiveness, and shared humanity, congregations adopt less confrontational attitudes.
4. The community should be sensitized on responsible social media use. Capacity building on digital literacy and misinformation control will help residents verify information before sharing it, thereby reducing the spread of rumours that threaten peace.
5. Communication channels should be accessible to all groups regardless of literacy level or economic status. Public information campaigns in simple English and indigenous languages, as well as the use of community town criers and peace ambassadors, will enable wider circulation of authentic information and reduce misinterpretation.

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