
UTILIZING THE POTENTIALS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS AND PEACE BUILDING IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken to determine whether the inherent potentials of Community Development Associations in Benue State could be applied in conflict resolution and peace building in the State. From a universe of 314 registered CDAs in the state, a sample of 217 participants taken out of an expected 300, respondents from conflict prone LGAs, and 50 from non-conflict prone LGAs was taken for the study. Five research objectives and seven research questions guided the study. Survey research design was adopted while descriptive statistics was used to analyze data from the questionnaire. It was found that CDAs are not only involved in peace building; they are viewed as essential to it. It was also found that CDAs are not only involved in peace building; they are viewed as essential to it. Their grassroots legitimacy, participatory methods and relational proximity to their community members position them a critical agent in sustaining peace. Strengthening their linkages with formal institutions, providing training and securing funding would further enable CDAs scale up their impact and institutional relevance in conflict resolution in Benue state. Integrating CDAs into formal conflict resolution frameworks, while preserving their grassroots orientation is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable peace in the state.

Keywords: Community Development Association, Conflict, Conflict-Resolution.

INTRODUCTION

The world is full of conflicts of one nature and dimension or the other and Benue state has been having a fair share of them. There have been conflicts within villages, between clans and parts of local governments. There are inter community conflicts between communities in various Local Governments in the state, in the past and even currently on going in various parts of the state. From Ukum to Agatu; from Logo to Ado, from Buruku to Oju; it appears no local government in the state is free of these endemic conflicts. Conflicts prevent or discourage developments. They slow down developments and it has been said that no development can take place in the atmosphere of conflicts. That is why every effort should be made to nip them in the bud or prevent them as quickly as they erupt.

Statement of the Problem

When conflicts occur, peace builders/negotiators get involved in trying to mitigate the distortions and halt animosities. The government appointees, and other stakeholders, Community leaders, chiefs and NGOs use their positions either immediately, or after the conflicts rage for some time, to try to quell them. After a while they may calm down tempers and get conflict parties to sheath their antagonism. Many at times, though, the settlement is temporary as before long the conflicts resume as in the conflicts between Ukpute in Oju LGA and Bonta in Konahisha LGA as well as between parts of Gwer and Konshisha Local Governments.

At no time in the interventions do we clearly find organized Community Development Associations going alone or in partnership with the peace makers to resolve conflicts. However, these organizations have existed from the village level to clans in the various Local Governments. In the aims and objectives of their constitutions, working for peace in the process of development is prominently part of their other development initiatives. They are formed by the indigenes of the communities, by the people and for the people. This study examines the peace building and conflict resolution potentials inherent in these organizations and how best they can, have been or will be used in preventing conflicts and building peace in communities of Benue state

Research Questions

The objectives will be investigated through the following research questions:

- i. What are the inherent potentials which CDAs possess for use in developing their communities?
- ii. Do CDAs engage in conflict resolution within their communities?
- iii. Do CDAs facilitate conflict resolution between their communities and other communities?
- iv. What methods do CDAs use to prevent or mitigate conflicts?
- v. What are the outcomes of their efforts in peace and conflict resolution?
- vi. Have they ever been approached, as an organization, by governments or other organizations, to partner with them in any conflict resolution process?
- Vii. If CDAs engage in peace and conflict resolutions can there be peace and stability in their communities?

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Identify key potentials of Community Development Associations (CDAs) as catalysts for grassroots development in Benue State.
2. Find out if CDAs are involved in peace and conflict initiatives.

3. Determine the efficiency or otherwise of existing methods of intra and inter community peace building and conflict mitigating strategies.
4. Establish inter organizational linkages which the CDAs could utilize for facilitating peace and conflict resolutions in the state.
5. Recommend ways to be adopted in scaling up communal peace through conflict resolution strategies of the CDAs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Community Development Associations are only a subset of Community based organizations (CBOs). They are known by different names such as Local peace committees, (Issifu, 2016), and community development Unions. This research makes a distinction between ethnic or sociologically based Community Development Associations and urban or demographically created Community Development Associations. The former is 'formal and community based, social, non – guild, non-trade organizations formed principally to enhance the socio – economic well-being of the entire community rather than the narrow interest of members (Ode, 2015). The latter are creations of modern states or local governments from spatial layouts carved by survey departments where residents from different ethnic groups and backgrounds live in neighborhoods, "a group of people within a particular geographic area" (DeWet Schutte, 2016).

Ethnic Community Development Associations on the other hand, have come into existence because of the inability of government to take development to all the nooks and crannies of the states due to widening responsibilities of statecraft, 'breakdown of public institutions that catered for the people's welfare, difficulties of harnessing resources enough to tackle development needs of the various communities (Akinsortan, 2007, Gafwen 1999, Okpaga 2005). The reasons for the existence of ethnic based Community Development Associations are not exactly the same as that of their Urban counterparts. For urban development associations, there are no known disputes, for example, over land, fishing ponds, chieftaincy or market sites common with the ethnic development associations

In Nigeria, Development Associations, emerged in the 1920s and 1930s from the initiatives of migrant workers of Igbo and other smaller nationalities who took advantage of the labor opportunities provided by the colonialists and migrated into such urban areas of Enugu, Lagos and Jos. Being low income workers, they came together to pool resources to help each other to survive and to make efforts to mitigate shortfalls of socio – economic well-being of their communities back home. From their efforts, family unions emerged that widened into village and clan and ethnic umbrella unions and later perfected into Development Associations (Post and Vicars, in Okpaga, 2003 p 135). Thus, in origin, CDAs of our concern are somehow urban phenomenon made up of groups working for harmony, well-being and peace of their members and keeping surveillance of the development needs of their communities back home. Their identity names e.g Igede Development Association, Jemgbah Development Association, always reflect that of their families, villages and clans back home. Incidentally none exist as a modern state- wide organization, such as "Benue State Development Association."

According to Ray & Cohen (2012) Community Development Associations 'engage in voluntary mobilization of previously untapped local resources, skills and energies' as well as 'contributing reliable insights for identifying local problems and appropriate solutions'. Among the aims and objectives that guide their operations, we have that of promoting self help efforts in the community, initiating, executing and monitoring of community

development projects, ensuring peace and security within their community by collaborating with security agencies and governments. Their activities include “holding meetings to discuss their programmes and projects, identification of felt needs, participation in development projects” (Oyalowo 202, p.3 and various forms of self support. The provision relevant to this search is that of peace and security and collaboration with security agencies and government. How much of this is practiced by rural CDAs is yet to be verified during this study.

Some studies have dealt with Urban Development Associations in Lagos, and Wukari, Nigeria (Akinsorotan, 2018 and Oyalowo, 2021), but not much literature is found on the rural Community development associations in the country.

In a study undertaken to assess the potentials of CDAs as possible channels through which development information could get to and enhance development of communities in Benue State, Ode (2015) recommends a synergy between these organizations, governments and other stakeholders to scale up developments in their communities. If development is predicted on peace and harmony, this can better be achieved through partnership and the use of community-based institutions committed to socio- economic well-being of these locations whose attention should be applied in pursuit of peace and conflicts as well.

However, according to Oyelowo (2021) CDAs are rather treated as informal stakeholders due to their origin in self help and the spatial closeness and relational ties between members which diminish their perception as serious contenders in decision making process.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution on the other hand is, ‘a mechanism when conflicted parties” (most at times with the assistance of other stakeholders)” come together and sort out their incompatibilities and conflicts by peaceful means.’ Conflicts could arise over resources (eg farmlands, fishing ponds) territory, land, cultural identities etc. Conflict is defined by Wright, (1990, in NOUN 2008; 2) as 'opposition among social entities directed against one another,' while peace building according to the Institute for Democracy in South Africa is 'a proactive process that requires identification of conflict incidences; analysis of conflict structures, actors and trends, adoption of relevant responses and management mechanisms, and restoration of trust and confidence in conflict parties in each other' (NOUN2008). This pre - conflict building lends itself very useful to the preoccupation of CDAs in their surveillance of their communities. Predicating this on the provisions of the diffusion of innovations and participatory theories, (Ryan & Gross (1943), in Anaeto et al, (2005), CDAs appear to possess the potentials to be used in conflict mitigation and peace building in Benue State communities. The groups hold regular meetings to discuss vital issues in their communities, conduct periodic elections to democratically choose officials, intervene in communities when vital issues of significance come up in their localities.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories, the participatory development and the communities’ relations theories are used to anchor this study. The participatory development theory stresses the need to put members of communities seeking to develop on the driving seat of development activities. Popularized by Paulo Freire (1970) and Robert Chambers ((1983, 1984) the theory emphasizes that all forms of development activities should involve the active participation of local communities from planning through to implementation. Therefore, sustainable development which includes peaceful coexistence in communities can happen better when affected people have a direct role in shaping them. When therefore, CDAs that are informed and also form vital part of the Communities are made to be in the frontline role in peace building activities they can

cause enduring peace to be achieved. The theoretical foundation of this theory is to encourage the local people to participate actively in all forms of development activities because they have valuable knowledge to share; it encourages partnerships between governments and NGOs as sustainable development requires cooperation across different strata of society. The theory presents a people – centered approach to development ensuring that those affected by development (CDAs inclusive) are actively involved in shaping their future.

The communities' relations theory of conflict developed by John Paul Lederach (1995, 1997, and 2003) and Herbert Kelman (1922- 2022) on its part, places premium on building and maintaining positive relationships within and among conflict communities so as to address and resolve conflicts. The theory emphasizes on the need for dialogue, collaboration and promotion of mutual understanding so as to bring conflicting parties to make and uphold peace. Kolman on his part advocated and personally used small group dialogues to foster understanding between conflicting parties. This lends strong support to the use of Community micro groups like CDAs in peace building and conflict resolution processes. For achieving enduring peace, the theory calls for building relationships, 'fostering strong, respectful and collaborative relationships between conflicting groups', promotion of dialogue and communication based on 'honest dialogue' to address misunderstanding and misconceptions.

This theory lends itself very useful for dealing with conflicting parties in Benue State and particularly using the instrumentality of the community development associations in conflict resolution and peace building processes. Being members of the various communities, they stand a better chance of speaking with the larger community, understanding the underlying sources of conflicts and the ability to handle issues frankly during the conflict resolution processes.

Empirical studies

Some studies have been done on the role of community development associations, and researchers have established their effectiveness in engaging local communities in decision making, encouraging citizenship participation in public affairs. Most of the studies establish their effectiveness in infrastructural development. In a study on Civil Society Organizations and conflict management: the Nigerian experience, Irene & Majekoduni (2017) held that the approach of using security agents to solve conflicts has not resulted in positive peace. She asserts that when civil society organizations stepped in “using tools from traditional religion, Christianity and modern conflict resolution mechanisms, they achieve better results”. They arrived at this conclusion after studying conflicts between Ife and Modakeke, in Oyo state, Nigeria: Umulere and Agulere in Anambra state, the Southern Kaduna crisis and the Ijaw and Itsekiri conflict in Delta State in Nigeria.

In a study of Local Peace Committees (another nomenclature for Community Development Associations), across East and West Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Malawi, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Ghana), Issifu (2016, p144) concluded that ‘decisively the application of negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, advocacy joint problem solving, community conferencing and the like are part of the African conflict resolution components used by Local Peace committees to guarantee most of the positive conflict tenacities in countless war prone states in Africa.’ He found that Local Peace Committees have played and continued to play key roles in maintaining, managing and resolving most of these long drawn out conflicts in Africa”,

This happens at large scale conflict areas but can also be applied to community level conflicts that dot Benue state. The strategies make the use of CDAs attractive in conflict resolution in

Benue State and forecloses the use of military force, external or foreign based negotiators in favor of local organizations. Issifu recommends that the local peace committees be identified and supported by providing them with the legal and financial support to operate and deal with large scale social conflicts in their communities.

Gap for this Study

While extensive attention has been given to the role of state actors, traditional rulers, NGOs, and religious bodies in conflict resolution in Benue State, the role of Community Development Associations (CDAs) remains significantly underexplored in both policy discourse and academic literature. Even though the State has created an executive department to handle community conflicts in the state, an interview with an officer of the organization held that they hardly involve CDA officials in their peace initiatives because when they are needed, they might not be readily available and in some cases some of their officials demand for payment before they can get involved in peace and conflict resolution processes.

Despite their ubiquitous presence in rural and semi-urban communities since the post-colonial era, and their constitutionally stated commitment to promoting peace alongside development, there is a lack of empirical evidence examining their contributions to peace building and conflict mitigation. Existing studies have focused primarily on the infrastructural and economic impacts of CDAs, particularly in delivering community-led projects such as schools, roads, and health centres. However, these works have largely overlooked the strategic social functions of CDAs, especially their peace building mandates. This omission is significant, given the rising frequency and persistence of intra- and inter-communal conflicts in the state from the protracted clashes in Agatu to recurring tensions between communities like Ukpute and Bonta, and parts of Gwer East and Konshisha LGAS. These conflicts have stalled development, displaced communities, and weakened social cohesion.

Furthermore, although government officials and community leaders are frequently called upon to mediate disputes, there is little documentation of deliberate partnerships between these formal actors and CDAs. Yet, CDAs possess critical attributes—such as deep-rooted legitimacy, organizational structure, and local knowledge, and democratic operations that could render them effective agents of conflict prevention and resolution. Their exclusion from the formal peace architecture represents a missed opportunity to strengthen grassroots resilience. This study addresses that gap by investigating the untapped conflict resolution potential embedded within the operational framework of CDAs, assessing their current and possible contributions to peace building, and examining how they might be strategically positioned as partners in sustainable conflict mitigation. By exploring this under-researched dimension, the study aims to fill a critical void in peace and development scholarship in Benue State and beyond, while offering practical insights for policy and programming at the grassroots level.

Results and Discussion

This study explores the role of Community Development Associations (CDAs) as grassroots institutions in peace building and conflict resolution within Benue State, Nigeria. Community Development Associations are locally organized bodies that often serve as intermediaries between communities and external actors, facilitating development projects, mediating disputes, and enhancing social cohesion. Given their embedded position within local social structures, CDAs are uniquely positioned to contribute to conflict mitigation and community stability. This research seeks to evaluate the extent and effectiveness of their involvement in these roles, while identifying the challenges they face and opportunities for scaling their

impact. The analysis that follows presents a detailed examination of respondents' perceptions and experiences with CDAs across multiple dimensions including organizational capacity, methods of conflict resolution, frequency of engagement, inter-organizational linkages, and community outcomes, offering critical insights into how these associations function as agents of peace at the grassroots level.

A total of 271 individuals participated in the survey. As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 199 males (73.4%) and 72 females (26.6%). Participants' ages ranged across six categories: 18–27 years (11.1%), 28–37 years (13.3%), 38–47 years (39.1%), 48–57 years (21.0%), 58–67 years (12.9%), and 68 years and above (2.6%). Regarding educational attainment, the majority held either an NCE, A/Level, or ND qualification (43.5%), followed by HND, BSc, or BA degrees (35.8%). A smaller proportion had attained a master's degree (7.7%) or a doctorate (0.7%), while others had secondary (8.9%), primary (3.0%), or no formal education (0.4%). In terms of Community Development Association (CDA) affiliation, 22.1% of respondents were officials (Exco), 62.0% were members, and 15.9% were non-members.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Category	Freq. (N)	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	199	73.4
	Female	72	26.6
Age	18–27	30	11.1
	28–37	36	13.3
	38–47	106	39.1
	48–57	57	21.0
	58–67	35	12.9
	68 and above	7	2.6
	None	1	0.4
	Primary	8	3.0
Highest Educational Attainment	Secondary	24	8.9
	NCE, A/Level, ND	118	43.5
	HND, BSc, BA	97	35.8
	Masters	21	7.7
	Doctorate	2	0.7
	Official (Exco)	60	22.1
	Member	168	62.0
CDA Membership Status	Non-member	43	15.9
	Civil Servant	114	42.1
<u>Occupation</u>	Farmer	46	14.4
	Trader	47	17.4
	Artisan	13	4.8
	Unemployed	19	7.0
	Others	39	14.4

CDA Pre-Occupations

Participants (N = 271) were asked to rank in order of priority (from 1 = lowest to 10 = highest) the major pre-occupations of their Community Development Association (CDA) across five domains: infrastructural development, capacity building, solving conflicts within

the community, solving conflicts between communities, and a lack of involvement most of the time. As shown in Table 2, Infrastructural development (e.g., roads, bridges, schools, markets) was broadly prioritized, with the highest frequency of responses (20.7%) occurring at rank 8. The weighted average rank for this domain was 5.97, suggesting a moderate-to-high priority level among respondents. Capacity building (e.g., training, skill acquisition, scholarships) saw the most responses at rank 4 (17.3%), and a weighted average rank of 4.76. This reflects a moderate prioritization of activities aimed at individual and community skill development. Engagement in solving conflicts within the community received the highest frequency of responses at rank 7 (16.2%). This domain achieved a weighted average rank of 6.86, indicating a relatively high perceived importance placed on resolving intra-community disputes.

Engagement in solving conflicts between communities had the highest number of responses at rank 10 (18.5%). The weighted average rank for this domain was 6.76, which, similar to internal conflict resolution, demonstrates a relatively high priority placed on inter-community peace building efforts. Interestingly, the category ‘Not involved most of the times’ had the majority of responses at rank 1 (22.5%), with a weighted average rank of 3.59. This suggests that, while some perceive CDAs to be occasionally disengaged, this is not seen as a dominant characterization of their activities overall.

Table 2: Summary of CDA Pre-occupation Rankings

Domain			Most Frequent Rank	Weighted Average Rank
Infrastructural Development			8	5.97
Capacity Building			4	4.76
Solving Conflicts Within Community			7	6.86
Solving Conflicts Between Communities			10	6.76
Not Involved Most Times			1	3.59

The responses provided by community members paint a revealing picture of the roles and expectations placed on Community Development Associations (CDAs) within their local environments. A key theme emerging from the data is the central importance of conflict resolution. Participants consistently ranked *solving conflicts within and between communities* among the highest priorities, with average rankings of 6.86 and 6.76, respectively. This highlights a widely held perception that CDAs serve as frontline mechanisms for maintaining peace and addressing disputes. In contexts where formal institutions may be distant, inaccessible, or distrusted, CDAs appear to fill a critical governance gap, acting as both mediators and peacekeepers. Equally noteworthy is the moderate emphasis on infrastructural development, which received an average ranking of 5.97. While infrastructure such as roads, schools, and markets remain a visible and tangible indicator of development, it may not currently command the same urgency as social harmony or may be seen as requiring collaboration with external factors, such as local governments or donor agencies. This suggests that while communities value development, they may prioritize what they can realistically influence or manage on their own like social cohesion over projects that demand significant external funding and technical support.

In contrast, capacity building, though important, received a slightly lower average rank of 4.76. This includes activities such as skill acquisition, training, and scholarships. The ranking

suggests that while communities recognize the value of empowerment and human capital development, these efforts might not always be immediately feasible or may be perceived as less pressing than more immediate communal concerns like conflict resolution.

A particularly reassuring finding is that most respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that CDAs are inactive. The domain “*Not involved most of the times*” had the lowest weighted average rank of 3.59, with the highest number of respondents placing it at the lowest rank. This serves as a vote of confidence in the perceived activity and relevance of these associations, indicating that CDAs are indeed present and engaged in community affairs, countering any narratives of irrelevance or ineffectiveness. Together, these findings present CDAs as active agents of peace and grassroots leadership, with strong community trust. However, they also point to an opportunity: if conflict resolution and peace building are the anchors of CDA credibility, then expanding their scope to include structured capacity building and selective infrastructure development could further consolidate their role and long-term impact. Strengthening the capabilities of CDA leaders—through training, access to resources, and formal recognition—may empower them to fulfil their expanding mandate while maintaining the trust and legitimacy they currently enjoy.

Conflict Resolution Success

In assessing how respondents measure their success in conflict resolution, as shown in Table 3 four distinct contexts were analysed: acting alone, working with government, collaborating with other CDAs, and engaging with other stakeholders. Participants were asked to rank their success on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). The findings reveal critical insights into the perceived effectiveness of various forms of engagement in resolving conflicts.

Table 3: Conflict Resolution Success Analysis

Context	Most Frequent Score	Weighted Average Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Alone	8	5.73	5.73	2.74
With Government	6	5.97	5.97	2.65
With Other CDAs	7	6.76	6.76	2.29
With Other Stakeholders	7	6.59	6.59	2.45

The most frequently chosen score when resolving conflicts alone was 8, selected by 23.6% of respondents. However, the weighted average success score was 5.73, the lowest among all four contexts (See Table 3). This suggests that while some individuals perceive their solo efforts as effective, the overall consensus reflects moderate success. The relatively lower average implies that acting alone may have limitations in complex or deeply rooted conflicts, likely due to lack of legitimacy, authority, or support from key parties. Conflict resolution efforts carried out by individuals alone may face constraints in terms of influence and reach. This finding supports the argument for collaborative conflict management structures and indicates that CDAs might benefit from institutionalizing team-based or multi-stakeholder strategies when addressing community disputes.

When respondents worked with government institutions, the most common success score was 6, and the weighted average was slightly higher at 5.97. The frequency distribution here is more balanced, with moderate-to-high ratings spread across the middle to upper end of the scale. Although not the top-performing strategy, this partnership still yields reasonable success, perhaps due to access to formal resources, authority, or enforcement mechanisms that individuals or local groups may lack. Government partnerships appear to moderately

enhance conflict resolution outcomes, but they may also come with challenges such as bureaucracy, slow response times, or perceived lack of community understanding. For improved results, strengthening trust and communication between CDAs and government entities may help bridge gaps and enhance coordination.

Working with other CDAs had one of the highest weighted average scores (6.76) and a most frequent score of 7, highlighting strong perceived success when CDAs work in synergy. Respondents evidently view peer collaboration as a robust strategy, potentially due to shared community knowledge, mutual respect, and the collective legitimacy of local actors. This collective approach likely fosters trust among community members and offers a broader base of support. Inter-CDA collaboration stands out as a powerful model for conflict resolution. It encourages knowledge-sharing and resource pooling and reinforces the community-based nature of peace building. Policies and programs that support inter-CDA networking, federations, or joint taskforces may enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of conflict resolution efforts.

Working with other stakeholders also received a high average success rating of 6.59, with a modal score of 7. "Other stakeholders" may include religious leaders, traditional authorities, NGOs, or community elites. The findings suggest that involving a diverse set of actors enhances the credibility and reach of resolution efforts, possibly because these stakeholders carry moral authority or specialized resources. Broad-based stakeholder engagement is highly valued in resolving conflict, underscoring the importance of inclusive processes. This supports the principle of participatory governance and highlights the potential for CDAs to act as conveners or facilitators in multi-stakeholder dialogue. Building coalitions and maintaining inclusive conflict resolution forums could be a best practice in community peace building.

The results underscore the critical role of collaboration in successful conflict resolution. Acting alone has limited impact, while partnership, particularly with other CDAs or stakeholders—amplifies perceived success. This points to a need for: capacity building for collaborative leadership within CDAs, formalizing partnerships between CDAs and government actors to improve responsiveness and accountability, creating platforms for inter-CDA and multi-stakeholder engagement in conflict management and investing in inclusive, community-led mechanisms that promote dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation. Overall, the findings advocate for a collective, coordinated approach to conflict resolution where community-based actors, state institutions, and other stakeholders work together to sustain peace and cohesion at the grassroots level.

Perceptions of Peace with CDA Involvement

Participants responded to a series of statements regarding the role of CDAs in peace building. As shown in Table 4, the findings reveal a dominant belief that CDAs play a central role in maintaining peace and harmony in communities. Most respondents (98.2%) agreed that peace and harmony can be better guaranteed with CDA involvement ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 0.13$), whereas only 13.3% believed that peace is better guaranteed through government-only initiatives ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.34$).

Table 4: Summary of Responses on Perceptions of CDA and Peace Initiatives

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	M	SD
<i>Peace better guaranteed with CDA involvement</i>	98.2%	1.8%	0.98	0.13
<i>Peace better guaranteed by only Government</i>	13.3%	86.7%	0.13	0.34
<i>Peace better achieved by outside stakeholders</i>	22.9%	77.1%	0.23	0.42
<i>Peace better achieved through synergy incl. CDA</i>	96.7%	3.3%	0.97	0.18
<i>CDA qualities useful in resolving conflicts</i>	98.5%	1.5%	0.99	0.12
<i>CDA's capacity for group discussion</i>	95.6%	4.4%	0.96	0.21
<i>CDA engages in regular consultations</i>	95.6%	4.4%	0.96	0.21
<i>CDA has extensive linkage for analysis</i>	90.8%	9.2%	0.91	0.29
<i>CDA has democratic leadership traits</i>	66.4%	33.6%	0.66	0.47
<i>CDA enlightens on conflict issues</i>	95.9%	4.1%	0.96	0.2
<i>CDAs are behind most conflicts</i>	16.6%	83.4%	0.17	0.37

Similarly, only 22.9% agreed that external stakeholders are more effective in ensuring community peace ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.42$), while an overwhelming 96.7% supported a synergistic approach involving all stakeholders including CDAs ($M = 0.97$, $SD = 0.18$). Nearly all respondents (98.5%) believed that the inherent qualities of CDAs are useful in resolving conflicts ($M = 0.99$, $SD = 0.12$), including their capacities for group discussion (95.6%), regular consultations (95.6%), and extensive linkages for problem analysis (90.8%). Additionally, 95.9% affirmed CDAs' capacity to enlighten the community on conflict issues ($M = 0.96$, $SD = 0.19$). While a majority (66.4%) endorsed democratic leadership transitions within CDAs ($M = 0.66$, $SD = 0.47$), this was the lowest endorsement among positive items. Only 16.6% believed that CDAs are responsible for most community conflicts ($M = 0.17$, $SD = 0.37$). These results imply that CDAs are perceived as effective and legitimate institutions for community peace building. The low endorsement of government-only and external solutions further underscores the need for localized, participatory approaches to conflict resolution. Policies and interventions should strengthen CDA capacities and include them as key partners in peace initiatives.

CDA and Conflict Resolution

1. Main Focus of CDA: Respondents were asked to identify the focus of Community Development Associations (CDAs) in their area. The results show that 49.4% of respondents selected development projects, making it the most frequently cited focus. This was followed by advocacy (22.8%) and conflict resolution (16.6%) (Table 5). Social welfare and other functions received limited attention, suggesting they are not perceived as central functions of the CDA. These findings highlight a prioritization of infrastructure and visible development activities by CDAs. While this focus aligns with common expectations from grassroots organizations, it raises concerns about the potential neglect of equally critical functions such as social welfare and sustained peace building. The low percentage for conflict resolution, despite its importance in community stability, may indicate either limited capacity or a perception that CDAs are not best suited for this role. This calls for a rebalancing of CDA priorities, particularly in volatile or high-conflict regions where peace building should be fore-grounded alongside development.

Table 5: Main Focus of CDA

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Development project	134	49.4	1	1.92	1.11
Advocacy	62	22.9	2	1.92	1.11
Conflict resolution	45	16.6	3	1.92	1.11
Social Welfare	23	8.5	4	1.92	1.11
Others	7	2.6	5	1.92	1.11

2. Types of Conflicts Resolved: Participants identified various types of conflicts that CDAs have been involved in resolving. Family disputes (40.2%) and land disputes (36.2%) emerged as the most commonly addressed (Table 6). Other types, including political conflicts (8.9%), resource sharing disputes (7.7%), and ethnic/religious tensions (6.3%) were less frequently reported (Table 6). The dominance of family and land disputes reflects CDAs' embeddedness in everyday community issues, where informal mechanisms can be both accessible and effective. However, the low engagement in politically or religiously charged conflicts suggests structural or legitimacy limitations. It could also reflect avoidance strategies where CDAs deliberately steer clear of contentious, high-risk issues that may lead to backlash or loss of neutrality. The pattern calls for strengthening CDAs' conflict mediation capacity and equipping them with tools to handle more complex and sensitive disputes.

Table 6: Types of Conflicts Resolved

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Land Disputes	98	36.2	1	2.1	1.2
Family Disputes	109	40.2	2	2.1	1.2
Political Conflicts	24	8.9	3	2.1	1.2
Resource Sharing Conflict	21	7.7	4	2.1	1.2
Ethnic/Religious Conflict	17	6.3	5	2.1	1.2
Others	2	0.7	6	2.1	1.2

3. Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution: To assess community trust in CDAs, respondents were asked to evaluate their effectiveness in conflict resolution. A combined 91.2% rated CDAs as either 'very effective' (40.6%) or 'effective' (50.6%) (See Table 7). Neutral, ineffective, and very ineffective ratings collectively accounted for less than 9%. This overwhelming vote of confidence signals high legitimacy of CDAs as conflict mediators. However, such positive perceptions, while encouraging, must be critically examined in relation to actual resolution outcomes. High ratings could be influenced by familiarity bias, where community members prefer local institutions even if their success rates vary. Further research should explore how effectiveness is defined by respondents—whether in terms of fairness, speed, or long-term resolution—and compare perceptions with independent outcome metrics.

Table 7: Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Very effective	110	40.6	1	1.7	0.7
Effective	137	50.6	2	1.7	0.7
Neutral	20	7.4	3	1.7	0.7
Ineffective	2	0.7	4	1.7	0.7
Very ineffective	2	0.7	5	1.7	0.7

4. **Methods Used to Resolve Conflicts:** Respondents reported the use of various resolution methods by CDAs. Community dialogue dominated (64.5%), followed by mediation (20.3%) and, to a much lesser extent, advocacy/awareness campaigns (8.5%) and arbitration (5.9%) (See Table 8). These findings reinforce the notion that CDAs heavily rely on culturally embedded mechanisms of deliberation and consensus-building. While this approach can foster community ownership and prevent escalation, the underutilization of structured methods like arbitration may limit the CDA's ability to handle more complex or multi-party disputes. It raises the question of whether informal methods are sufficient in increasingly plural and diverse communities, and whether hybrid mechanisms that blend traditional dialogue with formal dispute resolution could yield better outcomes.

Table 8: Methods Used to Resolve Conflicts

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Mediation	55	20.3	1	2.63	0.92
Arbitration	16	5.9	2	2.63	0.92
Community Dialogue	175	64.6	3	2.63	0.92
Advocacy & Awareness Campaigns	23	8.5	4	2.63	0.92
Others	2	0.7	5	2.63	0.92

5. **Frequency of Addressing Conflicts:** As shown in Table 9, the frequency with which CDAs engage in conflict resolution varies, with 35.2% of respondents indicating 'occasionally', 31.0% 'often', and 26.9% 'always'. Only 5.5% selected 'rarely' and less than 1% chose 'never'. These results suggest that conflict resolution is a routine function for most CDAs, though not necessarily constant. The variation may reflect differences in community need, internal CDA capacity, or even leadership style. While the data affirms the role of CDAs in peace maintenance, it also implies potential inconsistency in service delivery. This highlights the need for standard operating frameworks and sustained funding to institutionalize peace functions.

Table 9: Frequency of Addressing Conflicts

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Always	73	26.9	1	2.21	0.92
Often	84	31.0	2	2.21	0.92
Occasionally	98	36.2	3	2.21	0.92
Rarely	15	5.5	4	2.21	0.92
Never	1	0.4	5	2.21	0.92

6. **Challenges in Conflict Resolution:** Participants identified the primary challenges faced by CDAs in conflict resolution. The most cited was lack of community trust (35.4%), followed by limited training (25.4%) and lack of funding (20.7%). Political interference (17.3%) was also noted (See Table 10). Lack of trust undermines the very legitimacy on which CDAs depend. It raises critical questions about transparency, accountability, and fairness in CDA processes. Limited training and funding reflect systemic neglect of peace building capacity. Political interference, while less frequently mentioned, poses a strategic threat—jeopardizing neutrality and polarizing local institutions. These findings advocate for a comprehensive capacity development agenda that includes leadership training, community engagement, and financial planning.

Table 10: Challenges in Conflict Resolution

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Lack of funding	56	20.7	1	2.53	1.04
Limited training	69	25.5	2	2.53	1.04
Lack of community trust	96	35.4	3	2.53	1.04
Political interference	47	17.3	4	2.53	1.04
Others	3	1.1	5	2.53	1.04

7. Opportunities for Improvement: When asked about opportunities to enhance CDA conflict resolution, 49.1% pointed to collaboration with government and NGOs, followed by training (18.1%), community mobilization (17.7%), and increased funding (14.8%) (Table 11). The data suggests that CDAs are open to external partnerships and support structures. Collaboration with formal institutions can enhance legitimacy and access to resources. However, care must be taken to preserve autonomy and prevent co-optation. Investments in training and community mobilization should be seen not just as technical inputs but as mechanisms for deepening community ownership and trust.

Table 11: Opportunities for Improvement

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Training in conflict management	49	18.1	1	2.68	0.98
Increased funding	40	14.8	2	2.68	0.98
Collaboration with govt/NGOs	133	49.1	3	2.68	0.98
Community mobilization	48	17.7	4	2.68	0.98
Others	1	0.4	5	2.68	0.98

8. Role of Government: Respondents as shown in Table 12 emphasized that government support should prioritize official recognition of CDAs in conflict resolution frameworks (38.7%), followed by enforcement of CDA recommendations (22.5%), and facilitation of training programs (20.7%). Financial support ranked slightly lower at 17.7%. This prioritization reveals a strategic ask: CDAs do not simply want funding—they seek legitimacy and integration into formal peace infrastructure. Recognition would validate their role and open up access to coordinated action with state institutions. However, this should be accompanied by clear governance and accountability frameworks to avoid bureaucratization or politicization.

Table 12: Role of Government

Category	Freq.	%	Score	M	SD
Provide financial support	48	17.7	1	2.83	1.14
Facilitate training	56	20.7	2	2.83	1.14
Enforce CDA recommendations	61	22.5	3	2.83	1.14
Official recognition	105	38.7	4	2.83	1.14
Others	1	0.4	5	2.83	1.14

Discussion

This study has systematically investigated the role of Community Development Associations (CDAs) in peace building and conflict mitigation at the grassroots level in Benue State. Drawing from empirical data across multiple domains, the findings provide compelling evidence in support of the study's five objectives and their associated research questions.

Firstly, the findings confirm that CDAs possess significant inherent potentials that make them valuable actors in grassroots development and peace building. These include their capacity for group discussions, stakeholder consultations, enlightenment on conflict issues, and structured leadership, as affirmed by over 90% of respondents in Section C. These traits support Objective 1 and answer Research Question 1, showing that CDAs are well-equipped to contribute meaningfully to community stability. Secondly, the data strongly supports the assertion that CDAs are actively involved in conflict resolution. Over 91% of respondents in Section D rated CDAs as effective or very effective in resolving conflicts. Furthermore, conflict resolution, though not their top priority, was identified as a core function by 16.6% of respondents. This aligns with Objectives 2 and 3 and addresses Research Questions 2 and 3, confirming that CDAs engage in both intra- and inter-community dispute resolutions, particularly focusing on family and land disputes. Thirdly, the methods used by CDAs, particularly community dialogue and mediation, reflect indigenous and participatory approaches to peace building. While these methods enjoy strong community support, there is a noticeable underuse of formal tools such as arbitration or structured campaigns, highlighting both strengths and gaps in their strategies.

Fourth, the analysis points to limited but growing inter-organizational linkages. While CDAs are trusted by community members, they are not yet fully institutionalized as partners in formal peace processes. However, respondents identified collaboration with government and NGOs (49.1%) as the most promising opportunity to improve conflict resolution, indicating a readiness for deeper engagement. Fifth, the outcomes of CDAs' peace efforts are largely positive. The overwhelming community endorsement (over 96%) for CDAs' role in fostering peace suggests that their engagement leads to improved harmony and stability (Objective 5, Research Questions 5 and 7). Nevertheless, respondents also cited challenges such as limited funding, lack of trust, and inadequate training, which need to be addressed to scale up impact.

The data clearly demonstrate that the research objectives and questions have been effectively met. CDAs are not only involved in peace building; they are viewed as essential to it. Their grassroots legitimacy, participatory methods, and relational proximity to community members position them as critical agents in sustaining peace. Strengthening their linkages with formal institutions, providing training and securing funding would further enable CDAs to scale up their impact and institutional relevance in conflict resolution across Benue State.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that CDAs in Benue State are critical, albeit under-supported, agents of peace and conflict resolution. Their legitimacy, proximity to community members, and reliance on dialogic methods make them effective actors in sustaining local order. To scale up their impact, targeted interventions particularly in training, funding, and institutional recognition are recommended. Integrating CDAs into formal conflict resolution frameworks, while preserving their grassroots orientation, is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable peace in the state.

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