
Community Based Early Warning and the Prevention of Communal Conflict in Anambra State

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Abstract

Community based early warning is a participatory mechanisms that empower communities to monitor, detect and respond to early signs of tension through indigenous knowledge, social networks, and collaborative action. The study examined the effectiveness of these systems in early detection, rapid response, and contribution to sustainable peace, measured through indicators such as trust, social cohesion, and post-conflict economic recovery. The research relied on the Conflict Transformation theory, which argues that Community-Based Early Warning System (CBEWS) can transform underlying social structures and relationships to foster sustainable peace, rather than merely managing outbreaks of violence in communities. A mixed method design was employed, with a study population of 506,255 from 12 conflict-prone communities of Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamani formula. Consequently, 388 respondents comprising community members were selected using proportionate stratified sampling technique, while 12 traditional rulers were further selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using structured questionnaire and Key Informant Interview guide. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that CBEWS were generally effective in identifying conflict triggers at early stages. The study recommends that community leaders and local governments should strengthen existing community-based early warning systems by formalizing reporting channels, clarifying roles, and ensuring consistent monitoring of conflict indicators.

Keywords: Community, Early Warning, Communal Conflict, Indigenous knowledge, Social Networks, Collaborative Action

Introduction

Communal conflicts is a threat to national unity and development. This is because, they typically emerge from complex interplays of ethnic and religious tensions, political manipulation, and competition over scarce resources exacerbated by economic inequality and climate change. Communal conflict usually involves two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or acts of violence over claims of land ownership, religion, and political differences, leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties (Obboh & Hyande, 2006).

Communal conflicts remain one of the most persistent and destabilizing challenges confronting Anambra State. Over the years, several communities have been engulfed in violent disputes that disrupt social harmony, hinder development, and weaken the foundations of peace and security in the state. Notable examples include the long-standing Aguleri–Umuleri crises; Umuomaku-Ezira crises which have flared repeatedly over land ownership and traditional authority; the Omor–Iffite Ogwari land clashes, which have resulted in deaths, destruction of property, and displacement of residents; and the Nkpor chieftaincy tussles, which have polarized communities and undermined traditional governance structures. These conflicts, although varies in scale and intensity, share a common feature: they inflict severe human, social, and economic costs on the people of Anambra State.

The impact of these conflicts extends far beyond immediate violence, they are capable of creating lasting damage to social cohesion and economic stability. As a matter of fact, communities involve in such conflicts, experience profound losses including destruction of property, displacement of populations, and disruption of livelihoods. According to studies, these conflicts undermine development efforts, deepen poverty, and create humanitarian crises that affect the most vulnerable populations (Alabi & Famakinwa, 2017; Anierobi et al., 2024). While these challenges affect all regions of Nigeria, Anambra State presents a particularly interesting case. Though generally perceived as more peaceful than some northern states of Nigeria, Anambra has experienced its own share of communal conflicts, particularly those related to land ownership, chieftaincy disputes, and political competition (Nwoye & Nwekeaku, 2023; Nwaoburu et al., 2024).

Efforts were made on several occasions to address these conflicts. However, Government responses to these conflicts have largely been reactive rather than preventive. In such scenarios, security forces are usually deployed after violence erupts, and ad-hoc peace committees are constituted to negotiate temporary settlements. While these measures sometimes succeed in restoring short-term calm, they often fail to address the deep-rooted issues such as land disputes, boundary disagreements, competition for resources, and contestations over traditional leadership that drive these conflicts. Consequently, many of these disputes re-emerge after a period of uneasy peace, creating a vicious cycle of violence and resolution. The recurrence of conflicts underscores the inadequacy of the existing mechanisms and highlights a critical structural gap in conflict prevention and management framework.

Due to their tendency for communal conflict to re-occur, there is a critical need for proactive conflict prevention mechanisms. This is because, current approaches to conflict management in Nigeria have shown limited effectiveness. Government efforts typically involving security deployments and judicial processes have been described as ineffective and reactive (Nwaoburu et al., 2024). These state-led interventions often fail to address root causes and sometimes exacerbate tensions through perceived partiality or excessive force. Some of the

challenges with existing conflict management approaches include institutional weaknesses such as corruption, ethnic bias, and inadequate security infrastructure (Salami et al., 2021). Security agencies frequently fail to respond effectively to early warnings, highlighting systemic limitations in current prevention efforts.

As a result of these limitations, there is a growing recognition among scholars and practitioners that a fundamental shift from reaction to prevention is necessary (Guterres, 2017). This necessity resonates with what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the "unacceptable gap between rhetoric and reality" in conflict prevention efforts (Annan, 2006). And one of such preventive effort is through the deployment of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS).

Community-Based Early Warning Systems emerged as a promising method for preventing conflicts. The CBEWS is an integrated, people-centered mechanisms designed to monitor potential conflicts, assess risks, and enable communities to take proactive preventive actions (Pham et al., 2024; Ghazali et al., 2018). Unlike conventional systems, CBEWS emphasize local ownership and community participation throughout the warning process. These systems typically involve four key components: developing risk knowledge based on local context, continuous monitoring of conflict indicators, effective dissemination of warnings, and building local response capabilities (Pham et al., 2024). Importantly, information gathered through these systems undergoes thorough analysis to ensure context-appropriate responses.

The age-long traditional institutions in Anambra state for instance, provides a ready foundation for community-based conflict prevention. Traditional rulers, town unions, age grades, women's groups including the *Umuada*, and local vigilante groups have historically played significant roles in governance and conflict resolution. These local structures offer several advantages for early warning systems. Their deep and intimate knowledge of the dynamics of their communities make them exceptionally positioned to detect early conflict signs. The *Umuada*, for instance, have proven particularly effective in conflict resolution due to their unique social position and influence (Nwoye & Nwekeaku, 2023).

A major limitation of the state centered approach is the neglect of community-based mechanisms that can facilitate early detection of warning signals, timely dissemination of information, and proactive intervention before disputes escalate into violence. Local actors such as traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth organizations, women groups, and community-based associations are often the first to sense rising tensions in their localities. However, their knowledge, networks, and capacity are rarely integrated into formal conflict resolution frameworks. Instead, they are either sidelined or consulted only after violence has already broken out. This lack of institutionalized collaboration between government agencies and grassroots actors weakens the capacity of the state to manage conflicts effectively.

In the light of the above, the study examined the effectiveness of these systems in early detection, rapid response, and contribution to sustainable peace in Anambra state. The study adopted mixed method design, with a study population of 506,255 from 12 conflict-prone communities (Anaku, Omor, Aguleri, Umuleri, Nsugbe, Urum, Achalla, Isuaniocha, Ukpo, Ukwulu, Umuomaku and Ezira) of Anambra State. Data was collected using structured questionnaire and Key Informant Interview guide and analyzed using descriptive and thematic method of analysis.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the role of community-based early warning systems in preventing communal conflicts in Anambra State. Specifically, the study:

1. Examined the effectiveness of community-based early warning systems (CBEWS) in the early detection and rapid response to potential communal conflicts in Anambra State.
2. To determine the contribution of Community Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) to sustainable peace in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How effective are community-based early warning systems (CBEWS) in the early detection and rapid responses to potential communal conflicts in Anambra State?
3. What are the contribution(s) of Community Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) to sustainable peace in Anambra State?

Literature Review

This section presents the review of related literature under the following sub-headings: Conceptual framework; Empirical review, Significance and gap in literatures and Theoretical framework

Conceptual Framework

Sustainable Peace

Sustainable peace is multidimensional, encompassing justice, good governance, human rights, social cohesion, and developmental stability (Igbuzor, 2021; Arase & Iwuofor, 2007; Abdulkareem et al., 2023). These interlinked components reveal that peace is not a singular condition but a system of relationships, norms, and outcomes that collectively foster societal well-being. The interaction among these elements underscores the importance of viewing peace not merely as a political goal but as a developmental and moral imperative that shapes the quality of life within communities.

At the heart of sustainable peace lies justice, understood as the fair treatment of individuals and communities within legal, social, and economic structures. Justice is a critical preventive mechanism, ensuring accountability and redress for grievances that could otherwise escalate into conflict (Igbuzor, 2021). Heman et al. (2024) and Johnson (2023) maintain that the promotion of justice strengthens citizens' trust in governance and institutional integrity. In the Nigerian experience, the absence of effective judicial mechanisms for addressing land disputes, boundary disagreements, and resource control has exacerbated communal tensions and eroded confidence in state authority. Without justice, peace agreements remain superficial and fragile, easily undone by unresolved grievances.

Another defining element of sustainable peace is social cohesion, which refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of belonging among members of a community. Obeten (2024) describes cohesive societies as those in which cooperation, mutual respect, and interdependence replace suspicion and hostility. Trust is the central pillar of social cohesion; it facilitates collaboration across ethnic, religious, and political divides, enabling communities to resolve disputes peacefully. According to Awotunde and Onu (2025), Heman et al. (2024), and Adzenga et al. (2025), trust-building involves consistent dialogue and participatory decision-making that bridge gaps between citizens and the state. However, in Nigeria, widespread perceptions of governmental bias and selective justice have often undermined social trust, heightening polarization and conflict recurrence (Okeke et al., 2018). Strengthening social trust, therefore, requires transparency, inclusivity, and participatory governance processes that recognize local perspectives in peace building initiatives.

Social networks also play a vital role in reinforcing cohesion. Obeten (2024) argue that informal community structures religious associations, cultural unions, youth groups, and professional networks serve as platforms for dialogue and reconciliation. By promoting communication and mutual support, such networks help transform adversarial relationships into cooperative partnerships. They also act as early warning mechanisms by identifying emerging tensions and mobilizing community responses before disputes escalate into violence. In this way, social cohesion becomes both a measure and a mechanism of sustainable peace, demonstrating how relational capital within communities can substitute coercion with collaboration.

The final dimension linking sustainable peace to broader societal well-being is stable development, which embodies the symbiotic relationship between peace and progress. Sustainable peace cannot be realized in contexts of economic deprivation, social inequality, and environmental degradation. Likewise, development cannot thrive amidst persistent insecurity and displacement (Fund, 2015; Akintoye & Opeyemi, 2016; Heman et al., 2024). Holistic development integrates poverty reduction, environmental protection, and technological innovation as mutually reinforcing pathways toward stability. Chiakaan and Tsafa (2022) and Abdulkareem et al. (2023) emphasize that technological advancement and inclusive economic growth reduce structural inequalities and vulnerabilities that often drive conflict. Ogonnaya (2024) further posits that environmental stewardship and sustainable economic policies strengthen the adaptive capacity of communities, enhancing their resilience against conflict-inducing shocks.

Communal Conflict

Communal conflict represents one of the most persistent and complex forms of social unrest in many developing societies, particularly in Nigeria, where ethnic, cultural, and historical diversities intersect with economic and political inequalities. It denotes a situation in which groups sharing territorial proximity, cultural similarities, or kinship ties become embroiled in violent disputes over issues of identity, power, or access to resources. The phenomenon extends beyond mere interpersonal disagreement to encompass collective action motivated by perceived threats to group survival, autonomy, or dignity. According to Ibeanu (2006), communal conflict in Nigeria often arises from the interplay of historical grievances, competition over scarce resources, and the failure of state institutions to guarantee equitable development and justice. This conceptualization underscores that communal conflict is not merely a product of immediate triggers but the culmination of deeper structural and cultural contradictions within the socio-political fabric.

The Nigerian context illustrates how communal conflicts manifest through overlapping layers of ethnic consciousness, political marginalization, and economic disparity. Lamle and Ahgu (2022) argue that Nigeria's colonial legacy created fragmented socio-political boundaries that fostered ethnic competition rather than cooperation. The artificial amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into a single political entity without sufficient mechanisms for inclusion and equity laid the groundwork for perpetual contestation over land, leadership, and representation. Even after independence, state institutions often reinforced rather than mitigated these cleavages, as access to state resources became synonymous with ethnic advantage. As a result, communal identities transformed into instruments of political mobilization, enabling elites to exploit local grievances for broader strategic interests (Heman et al., 2024).

The dynamics of communal conflict in Nigeria cannot be fully understood without examining the relationship between identity and power. Identity serves as both a mobilizing force and a marker of exclusion. When communities perceive that their interests are systematically undermined or ignored, they tend to construct narratives of victimhood that legitimize resistance or violence. In many Nigerian communities, ethnic and religious identities operate as the most accessible forms of collective solidarity, particularly in the absence of strong civic institutions that might otherwise mediate disputes. Igbozor (2021) notes that such identities, while natural expressions of belonging, can become sources of division when politicized or weaponized in the competition for resources. This dynamic is evident in several conflict-prone regions, including the Niger Delta, Benue, Plateau, and parts of the South-East, where long-standing grievances over land ownership, boundary demarcation, and political recognition have escalated into violent confrontations.

A closer look at the underlying causes reveals that communal conflicts often stem from structural inequalities and governance failures. Structural violence, as conceptualized by Galtung (1969), provides an analytical lens to interpret the persistence of these conflicts. It suggests that systemic inequities embedded in political, economic, and social structures perpetuate marginalization and injustice, thereby creating the conditions for recurring violence. In Nigeria, uneven development policies, exclusionary political arrangements, and corruption within local governance frameworks have deepened communal distrust. For instance, in states such as Benue, Taraba, and Kaduna, competition over fertile land and grazing routes has repeatedly ignited clashes between farmers and herders. Similarly, in Anambra State, disputes over land ownership and chieftaincy succession have been recurrent sources of tension among neighboring communities (Mbah et al., 2021). These conflicts reflect not only competition over resources but also the erosion of traditional mechanisms of mediation and the limited capacity of formal institutions to deliver justice and accountability.

Early Warning Systems

The UNISDR (2015) defines early warning system as the set of coordinated capacities required to generate and disseminate timely, meaningful warning information, thereby enabling individuals, communities, and organizations threatened by conflict, crisis or hazard to take appropriate and timely action to reduce loss and harm. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2015) complements this definition by emphasizing EWS as integrated systems encompassing hazard monitoring, risk assessment, communication, and preparedness processes that link the technical and social dimensions of risk management. These definitions collectively underscore that the value of EWS lies not only in predicting hazards but in facilitating informed, coordinated action among diverse actors.

According to Basher (2006), their effectiveness depends on translating technical information into practical decision-making frameworks. This perspective aligns closely with the global disaster risk reduction agenda articulated in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), which calls for multi-hazard, end-to-end, and people-centered EWS that prioritize inclusiveness, accessibility, and trust. The Sendai Framework advocates for local engagement and shared ownership, asserting that community participation enhances the accuracy, credibility, and timeliness of early warnings (UNDRR, 2015).

In disaster management, EWS serve a dual purpose: they enable timely action to minimize immediate harm while fostering long-term resilience. Girons et al. (2017) and Quansah, Engel, and Rochon (2015) describe EWS as integral components of preparedness planning, offering decision-makers and humanitarian responders critical information for allocating

resources, coordinating relief, and prioritizing interventions. Beyond their operational function, EWS nurture a preventive culture by embedding awareness and preparedness into community practices and institutional frameworks (UNISDR, 2015).

The operational strength of early warning system depends on the interplay of its core components. The UNISDR (2006a) identifies four interdependent pillars risk knowledge, monitoring and warning services, dissemination and communication, and response capability which together define the functionality and sustainability of any EWS. These components do not operate in isolation but as interconnected processes that transform data into meaningful, life-saving action.

Community Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS)

Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) have emerged as an indispensable mechanism in both disaster risk reduction and conflict prevention discourse, representing a paradigm shift from centralized, top-down warning architectures to more inclusive, participatory, and localized approaches. The fundamental essence of CBEWS lies in its recognition of communities as proactive agents rather than passive recipients of external assistance. Within this framework, communities occupy a central position in detecting, interpreting, and responding to early signs of potential crises whether environmental, social, or political before they escalate into full-blown disasters or violent conflicts. The theoretical foundations of this approach are anchored in the broader principles of participatory governance and local empowerment, which emphasize the value of indigenous knowledge, contextual understanding, and social trust as vital components of effective risk management (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2022).

A community-based early warning system, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2019), constitutes “a system developed, owned, and managed by local communities for the purpose of detecting, monitoring, and communicating potential threats in order to prompt timely and effective responses.” This definition underscores an essential reorientation in early warning philosophy from state-centered control to community-led participation; highlighting the pivotal role of localized agency. Whereas traditional early warning systems tend to be bureaucratically driven, relying on sophisticated technological infrastructure and expert data interpretation, CBEWS emphasize grassroots engagement, communal learning, and the integration of indigenous observation systems. This transformation situates local populations not merely as information consumers but as contributors to the generation and dissemination of risk intelligence. Consequently, CBEWS do not exist in isolation from national frameworks but complement them, enhancing the timeliness, contextual accuracy, and credibility of the overall early warning process (UNDRR, 2022).

The central philosophy underpinning CBEWS is that communities, by virtue of their proximity to risk environments, possess unparalleled experiential knowledge of local dynamics. They can identify subtle and context-specific indicators such as changes in water color, migratory behavior of animals, market fluctuations, or rising tensions between neighboring groups that formal state institutions may overlook. This embedded local awareness creates a critical first line of defense against both natural and human-induced hazards.

Community involvement in early warning processes is justified on multiple grounds; practical, ethical, and developmental. From a practical standpoint, communities are almost

always the first to experience the onset of crises and the first to initiate response measures. In many remote or conflict-affected areas, state institutions and humanitarian agencies encounter logistical and political barriers that impede their capacity to act swiftly. Consequently, empowering local populations to generate, interpret, and act upon early warning information becomes an indispensable strategy for ensuring timeliness and relevance (UNDRR, 2022). Local communities, through their day-to-day interactions with their environment, can detect anomalies such as erratic rainfall patterns, crop failures, or unusual gatherings that signal emerging threats. For instance, Alabi, and Famakinwa (2017) note that pastoralists and farmers in northern Nigeria rely on ecological cues like changes in wind direction or animal behavior to anticipate droughts or potential conflict over grazing resources. Integrating such indigenous signals within formal warning frameworks enriches the predictive capacity of the system, ensuring that interventions are not only scientifically informed but also culturally grounded and context-sensitive.

CBEWS and Sustaining Peace

The significance of CBEWS in sustaining peace lies in their ability to institutionalize communication and cooperation across social divides. By facilitating information flow between conflicting groups, traditional leaders, civil society, and government agencies, these systems foster an environment conducive to early dialogue and collective problem-solving. The iterative nature of such communication mechanisms allows grievances to be expressed, verified, and addressed before they solidify into violent confrontation. This participatory vigilance resonates with Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace, which transcends the mere absence of direct violence to include the presence of social justice, inclusion, and mutual respect. CBEWS thus serve as operational platforms for positive peace, transforming latent tensions into opportunities for constructive engagement.

In Anambra State, where communal conflicts often revolve around boundary disputes, land ownership, and resource competition, community based early warning systems perform a critical role in diffusing potential triggers. These conflicts frequently emerge from deep-rooted perceptions of injustice and identity contestation that cannot be resolved by top-down security interventions alone. Through localized observation, dialogue forums, and trusted intermediaries such as elders and traditional councils, CBEWS establish micro-arenas for peace building where communities negotiate coexistence. This bottom-up architecture of conflict prevention aligns with the principles of human security, which emphasize people-centered approaches as opposed to state-centric models of security management (UNDRR, 2022). The human security framework recognizes that peace is sustained when individuals and groups feel safe, respected, and empowered to influence decisions affecting their well-being a condition CBEWS actively promote through participatory risk governance.

Empirical Review

Heman, Olusanya and Jimoh (2024) investigated the strategic significance of Conflict, Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (CEWRMs) in advancing sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria. Employing a content analysis framework, the authors integrated insights from game theory and comprehensive literature analysis to conceptualize CEWRM as a proactive peace building tool. The findings revealed that a well-strengthened CEWRM framework enhances the state's capacity to anticipate, mitigate, and manage violent conflicts, thereby contributing to sustainable peace and development. The study further emphasized that the absence of an integrated CEWRM structure exacerbates insecurity, demonstrating the necessity for institutionalized mechanisms that link early detection with rapid response. This research is directly relevant to the current study as it underscores the theoretical and practical

foundations of community-based early warning systems as instruments for peace building and conflict prevention.

Awotunde and Onu (2025) examined how peace education initiatives influence the behavioral disposition of community members toward conflict resolution, tolerance, and social cohesion in conflict-prone areas of Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative survey design, the study utilized Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with fourteen purposively selected respondents from Awe Local Government Area in Nasarawa State and Guma Local Government Area in Benue State. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings demonstrated that peace education significantly shapes community attitudes by fostering non-violent communication, mediation, and reconciliation practices. The study was valuable for understanding the behavioral and attitudinal dimensions that support community-based early warning systems, highlighting that social learning through peace education complements structural mechanisms of conflict prevention.

Chinwokwu (2015) analyzed Nigeria's internal security challenges through the lens of Community-Based Early Warning (CBEW) mechanisms. Using a qualitative analytical method, the study examined recurring ethno-religious and communal conflicts while assessing state responses. Findings indicated that persistent government insensitivity to early warning signals and the delayed deployment of intervention mechanisms have intensified insecurity and loss of lives and property. The study concluded that effective conflict management in Nigeria requires localized, community-driven early warning structures that complement formal security apparatuses. The study aligns with the present research by empirically validating the relevance of community participation in early detection and response processes for conflict prevention.

Udoh (2020) conducted a study to examine the theoretical and existential explanations for group mobilization into armed struggle in engagement with the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative empirical research design and purposively recruited a sample of 85 participants from 15 oil-producing communities in the Ikwere community of Rivers State, comprising youths, elders, women's organizations, and former militant groups. Data were collected through ten focus group discussions convened in two rounds, and analysis was carried out by the researcher alongside scribes and facilitators using audio and video transcriptions as well as field notes. NVivo 10 for Windows was employed to code the data and develop an inventory of recurring themes. The findings revealed that violent conflicts are closely linked to environmental pressures resulting from oil production, which expose the population to poverty, hunger, and violence, while additional conflict drivers included divide-and-rule politics by oil companies, chieftaincy tussles, illiteracy, and cult activities.

Agutu (2022) analyzed the efficacy of conflict early warning systems (EWS) as a conflict prevention framework in Africa, with a specific case analysis of South Sudan. The study sought to identify the determinants of EWS effectiveness, evaluate its operational performance in South Sudan, and diagnose the primary challenges to its implementation. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing a descriptive research design. Primary data was gathered through key informant interviews and open-ended questionnaires administered to a stratified sample of 400 participants, including government officials, international actors (AU/IGAD), local communities, and combatants. Analysis integrated descriptive statistics (for quantitative data) with thematic analysis (for qualitative data). The research confirms that EWS can create opportunities for timely and reliable conflict resolution if properly resourced

and institutionalized. In South Sudan, EWS were found to enhance public trust and deepen the contextual understanding of conflicts. The study validated the hypothesis that institutional and resource inadequacies constitute the principal internal impediments to effectiveness, highlighting severe challenges in the core processes of information gathering and dissemination. This study provides valuable empirical, field-based data on EWS functionality in a high-stakes conflict environment. Its mixed-methods design strengthens the validity of its findings. A key contribution is its explicit linkage of EWS failure to institutional capacity rather than merely technical shortcomings, arguing for a governance-centered approach to EWS strengthening.

Agbo (2021) articulate the conceptual and operational framework of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution's (IPCR) Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system and to advocate for its adoption in Nigeria. A conceptual analysis and descriptive overview of the IPCR model. The paper outlines the model's cyclical methodology, which integrates quantitative data analysis, qualitative conflict prognosis, participatory validation with stakeholders, and joint response planning. The IPCR framework is presented as a holistic model with significant potential for conflict prevention in Nigeria. Its strengths are posited to lie in its integrative, multi-stakeholder approach and its emphasis on contextual analysis, which enables the provision of conflict updates, analytical reports, and policy advisories to various levels of government. This study is valuable for describing a state-centric EWS model. However, as a descriptive overview from a likely insider perspective, it may lack critical distance and independent empirical validation of the model's claimed effectiveness. Its contribution is primarily heuristic, providing a template for a national EWS architecture.

Macherera & Chimbari (2016) conducted a systematic review of literature on Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS), with a focus on defining their characteristics, mapping methodological approaches for their development, and cataloguing the types of disasters they address (explicitly excluding conflict and financial crises). A systematic literature review utilizing Google Scholar and snowballing techniques. The final corpus (39 documents) was categorized to distinguish between general/global EWS and community-based EWS, with further sub-categorization for disaster types. The review identified 24 studies specifically focused on CBEWS, revealing a significant research concentration on natural disasters compared to communicable diseases. A critical finding was the scarcity of detailed, explanatory literature on the process of developing a CBEWS for human diseases, with only one study providing a comprehensive account. This study is foundational for the CBEWS field, providing a clear typology and identifying a major research gap: the lack of procedural models for CBEWS development, particularly for public health threats. Its systematic approach lends credibility to its findings, though its exclusion of conflict-based systems limits its direct applicability to the CEWRM domain.

Sufri (2020) investigated the opportunities for, and systemic barriers to, effective Community Engagement (CE) across all components of a EWS to enhance disaster preparedness. The study was a rigorous qualitative multi-method study, comprising a systematic literature review (31 documents), 39 in-depth interviews, six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Data collected were analyzed thematically, with CE assessed against the four pillars of integrated EWS. The study found that global EWS literature frequently fails to report community involvement across all four EWS pillars. Key challenges include unsustainable resourcing, lack of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and poor integration of local knowledge. In Aceh, a techno-centric, single-hazard (tsunami) focus has marginalized community engagement, leading to inadequate preparedness. Barriers were

compounded by a lack of community ownership and certain socio-religious beliefs. This study offers a profoundly transferable framework for analyzing CEWRM. Its systematic application of the integrated EWS framework to the concept of CE provides a robust model for diagnosing participatory gaps in any EWS context, including conflict.

Chinguwo and Deus (2022) evaluates the effectiveness and operational efficiency of the Community-Based Flood Early Warning System (CBEWS) in the districts of Nsanje and Chikwawa, Malawi. A mixed-methods study involving document review and questionnaire analysis. Qualitative data was transformed and quantified for analysis, while quantitative data from District Civil Protection Committees was processed using SPSS. The assessment produced qualitative findings on the system's nature and influence, benchmarking its effectiveness against the standard EWS pillars: risk knowledge, monitoring/warning, dissemination/communication, and response capability. This study exemplifies an applied assessment of a functioning CBEWS. Its use of a standardized benchmark (the four EWS pillars) allows for comparative analysis with other systems. The data transformation strategy represents a pragmatic approach to mixed-methods analysis, though it may risk oversimplifying complex qualitative insights.

Awotunde and Onu (2025) investigates the impact of peace education initiatives on fostering behavioral changes specifically in conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and social cohesion among community members in conflict-prone areas of Nigeria. A qualitative survey design utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KII) with 14 purposively selected participants across two Local Government Areas in Nasarawa and Benue States. Data collected were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study presents rich qualitative, thematic findings on how the nature, type, and method of peace education initiatives influence community behaviors, demonstrating a perceptible positive impact on local-level conflict dynamics. This research addresses a critical gap by focusing on the "softer," preventative measures of peace education as a complement to technical EWS. Its deep qualitative focus provides insights into behavioral change mechanisms. However, the small, purposive sample, while appropriate for the methodology, limits the generalizability of the findings.

Arulogun (2023) examined early warning system of conflict prevention strategy in Nigeria to diagnose the systemic failure within the Nigerian security sector, to recognize and act upon available early warning signs (EWS) of conflict, and to analyze the consequences of this policy vacuum. The study adopted a historical-analytical method using a mixed-methodology approach. Primary data was collected from 600 key informants across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Analysis employed descriptive statistics (percentage frequency count) and was framed by social conflict theory. The study identifies a pattern of governmental complacency and a lack of public literacy regarding EWS. It provides quantitative evidence of a correlation between ignored warning signs and conflict volatility, with regional variations across the country.

Summary and Gap in Literature

This study holds critical significance within the academic literature by addressing a pronounced and geographically specific research gap while contributing methodologically and theoretically to the fields of peace, conflict, and early warning systems. The literature reveals that while communal conflicts in regions like North-Central and North-West Nigeria have received substantial research attention, the South-East in general, and Anambra State specifically, have been relatively understudied. There is a notable scarcity of empirical research that examined measures needed for effective collaboration between local

stakeholders and government in re-forcing early warning signals for sustainable peace in Anambra.

Furthermore, the literature often treats EWER as a technical, data-driven exercise, with insufficient attention paid to the political, social, and institutional dynamics that determine whether warning signs can actually be effective or not. This study directly addresses these gaps by focusing exclusively on this under-researched region, providing much-needed empirical data and context-specific analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Conflict Transformation theory for an in-depth insight.

Conflict transformation theory, originally formulated by John Paul Lederach in 1995 and introduced by Lederach (1995) in *“Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures”*. Situating conflict not as an aberration to be suppressed, but as a fundamental social process with potential for constructive change (Lederach, 1995). Transformation theory departs from models that focus merely on managing or resolving immediate outbreaks of violence; instead, it emphasizes altering the underlying social structures, relationships, values, and communication patterns that give rise to recurrent conflict. The theory underscores the importance of viewing conflict holistically by considering the historical grievances, cultural norms, power asymmetries, and economic inequalities that sustain tensions over time, and not merely reacting after they erupt.

A central assumption of Conflict Transformation Theory is that conflicts are dynamic and inherent in human societies, arising from unmet needs, social injustice, or exclusion (Lederach, 1995; Botes, 2003). Rather than assuming conflict is wholly negative, the theory allows for conflicts, when properly addressed, to become catalysts for positive change. This requires inclusive dialogue, empowerment of local actors, and strategies that promote healing and reconciliation. In line with this, the theory assigns importance to long-term processes such as structural reform, capacity building, and relationship repair. It stresses the orientation towards addressing root causes of conflict like land disputes, historic exclusion, or contested identities, while also highlighting the transformation of relationships among conflicting parties rather than relying only on externally imposed solutions.

Furthermore, it emphasizes inclusivity through the participation of all relevant actors such as traditional authorities, youth, women’s groups, and community leaders, while advocating sustainability by recognizing that peace is not a one-off event but a continuing process that must persist beyond immediate negotiations or ceasefires. It equally underscores the empowerment of local structures through building community capacities to identify early warnings, negotiate internally, and maintain peace independently.

Applying Conflict Transformation Theory to Community Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) in Anambra State helps to frame the research in ways that explore how such systems help shift relationships, mitigate root conflicts, and build sustainable peace. In a context where land disputes, chieftaincy struggles, and political competition are recurrent, a transformation lens highlights how CBEWS facilitates the detection of early conflict triggers not just as a preventive measure but as an opportunity for community reflection and dialogue before tensions escalate. It also illuminates how the relationships between actors such as traditional rulers, Umuada, youth leaders, and vigilante groups can be strengthened or repaired through engagement in warning and response processes. In addition, the framework draws attention to how structural causes such as land tenure systems, unequal power, and

marginalization are addressed through local ownership of conflict prevention, rather than relying solely on external adjudication or reactive interventions.

Research Design

The study employed a mixed method research design. This research design as adopted, enabled the researcher to obtain firsthand information from the field while integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a mixed methods framework.

The study was carried out in Anambra state, located in the South-East region of Nigeria. The state was created on the 27th August 1991. Bounded by Delta state to the west, Imo state and Rivers state to the south, Enugu state to the east and Kogi state to the North. The state's capital is Awka. The region lies within latitudes 6°20'N and 7°00'E, and longitude 6°50'E and 7°25'E with an area of around 4,177,821 square kilometres.

Population of the Study

Table I: showing the population of the selected communities in Anambra state

Senatorial District	LGA	Population	Communities within the Local Government Area that have been affected by communal conflict occurring over the last three years and beyond
Anambra North	Ayamelum	156,067	Anaku (6973), Omor (149094)
	Anambra East	82, 367	Aguleri (39075), Umuleri (40394), Nsugbe (2898)
Anambra Central	Awka North	77, 631	Urum (30000), Achalla (40000), Isuaniocha (7631)
	Dunukofia	21,372	Ukpo (11394), Ukwulu (9978)
Anambra South	Orumba South	168,818	Umuomaku (92,000), Ezira (76,818)
	Total	506, 255	
<i>Source: Researcher, (2025)</i>			

The population of the study comprised of 506, 255 members of the above communities within the three senatorial zones of Anambra state that have experienced communal conflict within the past three years or more.

The sample size for this study comprised of 400 respondents, determined by the use of Taro Yamani sample determinant.

The sample size for this study comprised of 400 respondents (388 general community members and 12 traditional rulers, 1 each from a community). The sample for this study was determined by the use of Taro Yamani as shown below:

Formula:
$$n = \frac{N}{1+(Ne^2)}$$

where,

n = sample size

N = population size

e = error in limit

1 = constant

where also,

$$N = 506255$$

$$e^2 = 0.0025$$

Substituting in the formula,

$$n = \frac{506255}{1+(506255 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \frac{506255}{1+1265.6375} \\
 &= \frac{506255}{1266.6375} \\
 &= 399.68 \\
 &\approx 400
 \end{aligned}$$

A multistage sampling was further use to determine the number of respondents for the twelve conflict prone communities in Anambra state that were conveniently selected. See table below.

Table II: Sample distribution of the Study

LGA	Community	Population	Sample	Senatorial District
Ayamelum	Anaku	6973	6	Anambra North
	Omor	149094	116	
Anambra East	Aguleri	39075	31	
	Umuleri	40394	32	
	Nsugbe	2898	2	
Awka North	Urum	30000	24	Anambra Central
	Achalla	40000	32	
	Isuaniocha	7631	6	
Dunukofia	Ukpo	11394	9	
	Ukwulu	9978	8	
Orumba South	Umuomaku	92,000	86	Anambra South
	Ezira	76,818	48	
Total	12	506, 255	400	

A structured questionnaire rated on a Likert scale mixed up with multiple response option and Key Informant Interview (KII) guide were used to collect data for the study.

Results

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table III: Demographic distribution of respondents

S/N	Variables	Frequency (n = 388)	Percentage %
1.	Gender		
	Male	189	48.7
	Female	199	51.3
2.	Age (yrs)		
	18-30	103	26.5
	31-45	93	24.0
	46-60	102	26.3
	Above 60	90	23.2
3.	Highest level of education		
	No Formal	4	1.0
	Primary	108	27.8
	Secondary	156	40.2
	Tertiary	120	30.9
4.	Member of a Community Group		
	Yes	352	90.7
	No	36	9.3

Source: Field survey, 2025

Gender

Data in Table 1 indicate that 51.3% of the respondents were female, while 48.7% were male. This shows a slight female majority among the respondents. The near-balanced gender distribution suggests that both males and females were adequately represented in the study, although females constituted a marginally higher proportion of the sample.

Age

Results from Table 1 further reveal that respondents were fairly evenly distributed across age categories. Specifically, 26.5% were aged 18–30 years, 24.0% were within the 31–45 years age group, 26.3% were aged 46–60 years, while 23.2% were above 60 years. This distribution indicates that the study captured views across all major adult age groups, with a slight concentration among respondents aged 18–30 years and 46–60 years.

Highest level of education

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents had some level of formal education. Only 1.0% had no formal education, while 27.8% attained primary education, 40.2% had secondary education, and 30.9% possessed tertiary education. This implies that most respondents were sufficiently educated to understand and respond meaningfully to the survey instruments, thereby enhancing the reliability of the data collected.

Membership of a Community group

The results also indicate a very high level of community participation among respondents. As shown in Table 1, 90.7% reported being members of a community group, while only 9.3% indicated they were not members. This suggests strong community engagement and social cohesion among respondents, which is particularly relevant for studies focusing on community-based systems such as early warning mechanisms.

Research Question 1: How effective are community-based early warning systems (CBEWS) in the early detection and rapid responses to potential communal conflicts in Anambra State?

Results of Research Question 1 are presented in table 4 shown below.

Table IV: Mean with standard deviation responses of the respondents on the effectiveness of community based early warning systems (CBEWS) in the early detection and rapid responses to potential communal conflicts in Anambra State.

S/N	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	There are effective channels for reporting suspicious activities or rising tensions.	3.15	0.99	Agreed
2	The community monitors potential conflict triggers (e.g., hate speech, land disputes, political rivalry) in a timely manner.	2.26	0.83	Disagreed
3	Information about threats is communicated quickly to community leaders.	3.19	1.09	Agreed
4	Local groups (youths, women, age grades) actively participate in detecting and responding to early warning signs.	2.85	0.85	Agreed
5	Warning signs of conflict are often recognized before escalation.	3.23	0.95	Agreed
6	Traditional early warning methods (town criers, meetings) remain effective.	2.60	0.89	Agreed
7	The process for reporting emerging issues is clear and widely known.	3.11	0.98	Agreed
8	The time between noticing a problem and alerting the community is usually very short.	2.59	0.83	Agreed
9	Our early warning practices reduce surprises during sudden outbreaks.	3.18	0.97	Agreed

The results presented in Table 4 show the mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on the effectiveness of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) in the early detection and rapid responses to potential communal conflicts in Anambra State, as measured by the time lag between trigger identification and warning dissemination. The findings reveal that item statements 1 and 3-9 recorded mean values above the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicating that respondents generally agreed that CBEWS are effective in detecting conflict triggers and facilitating timely warning dissemination within their communities. Specifically, respondents agreed that effective channels exist for reporting suspicious activities or rising tensions, and that information about threats is communicated quickly to community leaders. The recognition of warning signs of conflict before escalation and the ability of early warning practices to reduce surprises during sudden outbreaks were also indicated by the respondents. These results suggest that CBEWS contribute meaningfully to proactive conflict management.

Furthermore, respondents agreed that local groups such as youths, women, and age grades actively participated in detecting and responding to early warning signs, and that traditional early warning methods, including town criers and community meetings, remained effective in CBEWS. This indicates that both formal and traditional mechanisms were jointly utilized in the early detection process. Although respondents indicated that timely monitoring of potential conflict triggers and the perception that the time between noticing a problem and alerting the community is usually very short ($\bar{X} < 2.50$). These findings suggest that while early warning systems are generally effective, some delays and inconsistencies may still occur in the monitoring and reporting process.

Research Question 2: What are the contributions of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) to sustainable peace in Anambra State?

Table V: Mean with standard deviation responses of the respondents on the contribution of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) to sustainable peace in Anambra State.

S/N	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Involvement of community state holders in Conflict prevention efforts have increased trust among community members.	2.89	0.66	Agreed
2	Early warning systems have strengthened cooperation and social bonds in the communities	3.17	0.99	Agreed
3	The overall level of peace and security has improved through conflict monitoring by the local communities	2.82	0.78	Agreed
4	Market and economic activities have become more stable due to reduced fear of sudden conflict.	2.71	0.69	Agreed
5	People are more willing to invest in businesses and farms because of improved peace.	3.03	0.99	Agreed
6	Relations with neighbouring communities have improved.	2.86	0.69	Agreed
7	The peace in our community is sustainable because residents actively maintain it.	2.64	0.83	Agreed
8	Early warning systems have reduced psychological stress related to conflict fears.	3.13	0.96	Agreed
9	Our community's conflict prevention practices can serve as a model for long-term peace.	3.50	0.75	Agreed
10	Compared to five years ago, there is greater unity and togetherness.	2.58	0.77	Agreed

Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on the contribution of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) to sustainable peace in Anambra State, particularly in relation to community trust, social cohesion, and economic activities in post-conflict settings. The findings reveal that all item statements recorded mean values above the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicating a generally positive contribution of the CBEWS in promoting long-term peace in Anambra State.

Specifically, respondents agreed that conflict prevention efforts have enhanced trust among community members and that early warning systems have strengthened cooperation and social bonds within communities. Similarly, improvements were noted in the overall level of peace and security through continuous conflict monitoring. In terms of economic stability, respondents agreed that market and economic activities have become more stable as a result of reduced fear of sudden conflict, and that residents were more willing to invest in businesses and agricultural activities due to improved peace conditions. The findings also indicate improved inter-community relations, as reflected in respondents' agreement that relations with neighbouring communities have improved.

Furthermore, respondents affirmed that peace in their communities was sustainable because residents actively participated in maintaining it, and that early warning systems have reduced psychological stress associated with fear of conflict. Notably, the highest mean score was recorded for the statement that community conflict prevention practices can serve as a model for long-term peace, highlighting strong confidence in the sustainability and the replicability of CBEWS-driven peace initiatives. Respondents also agreed that community unity and togetherness have improved compared to five years ago.

Major Findings

The Effectiveness of Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) in the Early Detection and Rapid Response to Potential Communal Conflicts in Anambra State

The findings revealed that CBEWS were generally effective in identifying conflict triggers at early stages. CBEWS collectively contribute to reducing the time lag between conflict trigger identification and warning dissemination. The Chi-square test result ($p = 0.03$) demonstrated a statistically significant association between CBEWS functionality and warning dissemination time. Thus, communities with functional CBEWS were significantly more likely to disseminate early warnings within 60 minutes compared to communities without functional systems.

Contribution of CBEWS to Sustainable Peace in Anambra State

The study found that CBEWS contributed significantly to long-term peace by strengthening community trust, social cohesion, psychological well-being, and post-conflict economic stability. The Chi-square test result ($p = 0.001$) revealed a statistically significant relationship between sustained CBEWS operation and sustainable peace indicators. Thus, communities with sustained CBEWS operation were significantly more likely to experience higher levels of sustainable peace, as reflected in improved trust, stronger social cohesion, and greater post-conflict stability.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) were generally effective in the early detection of potential communal conflicts particularly in

facilitating the timely identification, communication and responding to emerging conflict triggers. Evidence from both the survey data and key informant interviews indicates that the presence of structured yet flexible reporting channels enabled communities to recognize early warning signs before tensions escalate into open violence. This proactive capacity significantly reduces the likelihood of sudden and unanticipated conflict outbreaks, thereby reinforcing the preventive role of CBEWS at the grassroots level.

Insights from traditional rulers further illuminate how early detection operates in practice. Interviews revealed that conflict signals were often first noticed through everyday social interactions in markets places, farmlands, and even in communal gatherings, long before formal complaints emerge. As one traditional ruler explained, *"In this community, nothing happens in secret. When there is a land issue, boundary disagreement, or political tension, somebody will hear it first, either a youth, a woman, or an elder. And the message begins to spread."* This highlights the socially embedded nature of early warning processes and underscores the value of community vigilance in identifying localized conflict triggers such as land disputes, chieftaincy succession struggles, political rivalries, and youth-related tensions. These findings closely align with the finding of Heman, Olusanya, and Jimoh (2024), who reported that early warning mechanisms enhances conflict prevention when detection is closely linked to effective dissemination pathways. Similarly, Chinwokwu (2015) found that community-driven systems are uniquely positioned to capture early signals often overlooked by centralized security agencies. The present study reinforces this position by demonstrating that localized monitoring, grounded in community participation and trust networks, enhances both the timeliness and contextual relevance of threat identification.

Beyond immediate conflict prevention, the study found that CBEWS contribute significantly to sustainable peace in Anambra State by strengthening community trust, social cohesion, and economic stability. Traditional rulers observed that consistent conflict prevention efforts have gradually improved confidence in peaceful dispute resolution. As one interviewee remarked, *"People now believe that problems can be settled without fighting. That belief alone has reduced tension."* This growing trust appears to foster cooperation and reinforce social bonds within communities. In addition, the study also establishes a clear link between peace and economic well-being. Interviewees consistently associated stability with improved farming activities, market operations, and investment confidence from investors. One traditional ruler noted, *"When there is peace, farmers go about their land without fear, traders open their shops, and outsiders are willing to invest."* These observations corroborate Agutu (2022) finding that effective early warning systems enhance public trust and create conditions conducive to socio-economic recovery in post-conflict settings.

Furthermore, the sustainability of peace outcomes observed in the study reflects strong community ownership of conflict prevention processes. Traditional rulers expressed confidence in the continuity of CBEWS but emphasized the need for capacity building and intergenerational knowledge transfer. This finding is in consonant with the finding of Heman, Olusanya & Jimoh, (2024) that sustained community engagement across all pillars of early warning systems is essential for long-term effectiveness. The reported reduction in psychological stress associated with fear of conflict also suggests that CBEWS contribute to both material and psychosocial dimensions of peace building.

Finally, the perception that community-based conflict prevention practices can serve as models for long-term peace underscores the broader relevance and replicability of CBEWS-driven initiatives. This optimism echoes the findings of Chinguwo and Deus (2022), who

demonstrated that effective community-based early warning systems can function as benchmarks for broader peace and disaster management frameworks. Taken together, the findings of this study affirm that when effectively implemented and locally grounded, CBEWS represent a viable, adaptive, and sustainable strategy for conflict prevention and peace building in Anambra State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that Community-Based Early Warning Systems played a crucial role in preventing the escalation of communal conflicts in Anambra State. Functional CBEWS enhance the early detection of conflict triggers and significantly reduce the time lag between threat identification and warning dissemination. This timeliness enables communities to take proactive measures before conflicts escalate into violence. The study further concludes that effective implementation of CBEWS strengthens local response mechanisms by promoting coordination, inclusiveness, and collective responsibility among community actors. The active participation of traditional rulers, vigilante groups, women's associations, and other stakeholders enhances the effectiveness of interventions and significantly improves conflict de-escalation outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Community leaders and local governments should strengthen existing Community-Based Early Warning Systems by formalizing reporting channels, clarifying roles, and ensuring consistent monitoring of conflict indicators. In doing this, regular training programs should be organized for them to enhance their skills on the above, and in conflict detection, information sharing, and non-violent response strategies.
2. Post-conflict communities should be supported through economic empowerment programs, dialogue forums, and trust-building initiatives to consolidate the gains of CBEWS and prevent conflict resurfacing.

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