

REPOSITIONING CONTINUING EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, PEACE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Continuing education and lifelong learning have become essential frameworks for strengthening community development practice, especially in contexts experiencing rising insecurity, social fragmentation and misinformation. This paper examines the intersection between lifelong learning and community development, highlighting how sustained learning processes can empower individuals, enhance civic competencies, build social cohesion and foster resilient mechanisms for peace and security. Drawing on development communication theory, adult learning principles, transformative learning and community-based peace building models, the paper argues that continuing education provides communities with the knowledge, skills and collective agency needed to address emerging security challenges. Using a conceptual and literature-based approach, the paper demonstrates that lifelong learning enhances community participation, conflict mitigation, digital literacy, early warning systems and trust-building. The paper recommends policy reforms, curriculum strengthening and community-driven learning platforms that integrate peace education, security awareness and critical thinking as central components of community development practice.

Keywords: Continuing Education, Lifelong Learning, Community Development, Peace, Security.

Introduction

Contemporary societies particularly in developing regions such as Nigeria are experiencing complex challenges related to insecurity, community conflict, poverty, misinformation and breakdown of traditional social systems. These challenges demand frameworks that promote adaptability, critical thinking, social consciousness and collective action. Continuing education and lifelong learning, rooted in adult education philosophy, provide strategic avenues for empowering individuals and communities with knowledge and competencies needed for sustainable development and peace. Recent studies highlight that the rise of violent extremism, community clashes, and localized insecurity in Nigeria is strongly linked to limited access to education, weak civic engagement, and low digital literacy among community members (Adewumi & Igwe, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024). Lifelong learning platforms have been shown to improve civic skills, enhance information verification abilities, and strengthen

community resilience against misinformation a major trigger for social unrest and conflict escalation in the digital era.

Furthermore, contemporary research emphasizes that continuing education fosters inclusive participation in governance and peace-building processes, particularly in marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2023). By equipping individuals with negotiation, conflict mediation, and leadership skills, lifelong learning initiatives contribute directly to strengthening social cohesion and reducing community-level insecurity across Nigeria's diverse regions. Community development, as a field grounded in participation, empowerment, and local ownership, aligns closely with lifelong learning. When communities continually build knowledge and skills, they develop stronger resilience against threats such as youth radicalization, violent conflict, crime, and social disorder. Therefore, exploring the nexus between lifelong learning and community peace and security becomes crucial for strengthening development practice.

Recent evidence from West African peace-building programs indicates that community learning initiatives such as adult literacy programs, digital safety workshops, and community dialogue platforms significantly enhance collective action and early warning responses to potential conflicts (ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate, 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that continuing education is not only a tool for personal empowerment but also a cornerstone for building peaceful, secure, and resilient communities. Contemporary societies particularly in developing regions such as Nigeria are experiencing complex challenges related to insecurity, community conflict, poverty, misinformation, and breakdown of traditional social systems. These challenges demand frameworks that promote adaptability, critical thinking, social consciousness, and collective action. Continuing education and lifelong learning, rooted in adult education philosophy, provide strategic avenues for empowering individuals and communities with knowledge and competencies needed for sustainable development and peace. Community development, as a field grounded in participation, empowerment, and local ownership, aligns closely with lifelong learning. When communities continually build knowledge and skills, they develop stronger resilience against threats such as youth radicalization, violent conflict, crime, and social disorder. Therefore, exploring the nexus between lifelong learning and community peace and security becomes crucial for strengthening development practice.

Despite growing insecurity, social fragmentation, digital misinformation, and weakened community structures in Nigeria, continuing education and lifelong learning remain significantly underutilized as strategic tools for community development, peace, and security. Many communities lack access to sustained learning opportunities that build civic competencies, strengthen social cohesion, or enhance residents' ability to interpret and respond to emerging security threats. Recent reports indicate that limited civic awareness, weak digital literacy, and poor community engagement contribute to rising violent extremism, youth radicalization, inter-group conflict, and the widespread circulation of misinformation that fuels

tension and distrust (Adewumi & Igwe, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024). Although community development practice emphasizes participation, empowerment, and local ownership, many interventions fail to integrate continuing education and lifelong learning as mechanisms for equipping citizens with negotiation skills, conflict-resolution competencies, digital verification abilities, and early-warning awareness. As a result, communities struggle to build resilience, collaborate effectively with security agencies, or implement preventive peace-building strategies.

Furthermore, research and policy frameworks in Nigeria pay limited attention to the nexus between lifelong learning and community peace and security. Community learning centres are weak or nonexistent, curricula seldom incorporate peace education and digital literacy, and community development practitioners often lack training in participatory communication and conflict-sensitive programming. These gaps hinder the capacity of communities to respond to insecurity, manage diversity, and build sustainable peace. Therefore, there is a pressing need to examine how continuing education and lifelong learning can be repositioned as central pillars for community development, peace-building, and security enhancement providing individuals and communities with the knowledge, skills, and civic competencies required to navigate complex socio-economic and security challenges.

Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

Continuing education refers to structured learning opportunities undertaken after formal schooling including adult-education programs, professional courses, certification programs, and vocational training which enable individuals to acquire or update knowledge, skills, and competencies relevant to evolving socio-economic and professional demands. Lifelong learning is the broader umbrella concept, encompassing all forms of purposeful learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) undertaken throughout an individual's life to foster personal growth, social competence, employability, and civic awareness. Through these processes, citizens become better equipped to adapt to socio-economic changes, build civic competencies, engage meaningfully in community governance, and understand emerging peace and security challenges. In the context of Nigeria, civic-oriented adult and community-based learning as part of lifelong learning has been shown to strengthen civic participation, leadership among marginalized groups, social inclusion, and the capacity for informed, engaged citizenship (Adewumi & Igwe, 2023).

Community Development

Community development is increasingly recognized as more than just economic or infrastructure improvement it is a participatory, people-centered process that builds social capital, fosters inclusion, and strengthens collective agency. Recent scholarship on Nigeria underscores that genuine community development requires active community engagement in planning, decision-making, and implementation of development initiatives. For instance, studies argue that engaging communities in internal security and development planning fosters local ownership and trust, which are necessary for sustainable development efforts. Moreover,

community development involves building local capacity through education, skills training, civic awareness, and participatory governance to enable communities to identify needs, mobilize resources, and address challenges on their own. In contexts marked by economic hardship, structural inequality, or marginalization, capacity building empowers previously excluded groups (youth, women, informal-sector workers) to contribute meaningfully to communal welfare. This empowerment resonates with calls for building resilient and inclusive communities as a response to social and security crises.

Finally, contemporary community development must adapt to dynamic challenges including socio-economic instability, environmental pressures, and insecurity. Integrating social cohesion, justice, and resilience mechanisms into community development programs helps ensure that communities are not only economically and socially developed, but also socially cohesive, adaptable, and capable of withstanding shocks. Research on social cohesion and justice integration shows such inclusion strengthens community bonds and supports long-term sustainable development. Thus, in the face of Nigeria's evolving social, economic, and security challenges, community development reconceived as participatory, capacity-building, and cohesion-sensitive offers a powerful lever for empowering communities, reducing inequalities, and building a foundation for stability and growth.

Community Peace and Security

Community peace and security has emerged as a central concern in Nigeria, where state security agencies often struggle to guarantee safety for all citizens, especially at the grassroots level. Recent research highlights the importance of community-led and community-policing frameworks in addressing this gap. For example, the study of community policing initiatives in Abuja showed that integrating local actors and informal security providers into security architecture can enhance protection of lives and property and improve responsiveness to security threats. Moreover, community policing and broader community-based security efforts can foster trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility between communities and law enforcement building what some scholars describe as hybrid security governance. Such collaboration helps communities detect early warning signals of conflict or insecurity, mobilize local resources, and respond proactively. Beyond policing, peace education, conflict resolution training, and community dialogue are critical for long-term security and social cohesion.

A 2025 study investigating peace education initiatives in two Nigerian states found that such interventions reduced intergroup tension, promoted tolerance, nonviolent conflict resolution, and improved intercommunity relations. In addition, evaluations of community-driven peace-building in urban Nigeria underscore that empowering local communities to lead peace processes can transform conflict-prone spaces into resilient urban environments, capable of sustaining peace and development (Adeoye & Salihu, 2025). Therefore, community peace and security in the Nigerian context involves more than policing. It requires inclusive, participatory, and preventive mechanisms combining community policing, peace education, early-warning

systems, and collaborative governance to build sustainable safety, social cohesion, and resilience against conflict, crime, and insecurity.

Transformative Learning Theory

Recent studies emphasize that Mezirow's transformative learning theory remains central in contexts where communities face rapid social, economic, and security changes. In contemporary development practice, transformative learning helps adults critically reassess assumptions shaped by misinformation, intergroup tensions, or past conflicts, leading to more inclusive attitudes and problem-solving behaviors. Scholars argue that within African community development settings, transformative learning supports peace education, civic awareness, and behavioral reorientation by enabling individuals to question deep-seated prejudices and adopt new frames of reference that promote cooperation, tolerance, and collective action (Adeoye & Salihu, 2025; Mohammed & Iliya, 2024). Thus, the theory provides a robust foundation for understanding how lifelong learning can reshape mindsets and strengthen community resilience.

Development Communication Theory

Contemporary applications of development communication theory highlight its relevance in countering misinformation, enhancing civic participation, and strengthening community security. With the rise of digital technologies, communities increasingly rely on mediated information to understand local risks, conflict dynamics, or government policies. Recent research in Nigeria and other developing contexts shows that effective development communication through community radio, participatory media, digital literacy campaigns, and grassroots sensitization empowers citizens to interpret messages accurately and make informed decisions regarding peace and security (Ojo, 2023; Nwagu & Okorie, 2024). As lifelong learning programs build communication competencies, communities become better equipped to detect harmful narratives, share timely early-warning information, and mobilize collective responses to emerging threats.

Community-Based Peace-building Model

Current peace-building scholarship affirms that sustainable peace is most effective when driven from the bottom up, anchored in local ownership, cultural legitimacy, and participatory structures. The community-based peace-building model aligns with evidence showing that communities with inclusive dialogue platforms, mediation committees, traditional justice mechanisms, and youth–women engagement forums are more successful in preventing conflict escalation and strengthening social cohesion (Usman & Gaya, 2024; International Alert, 2025). Lifelong learning enhances these grassroots mechanisms by equipping community members with negotiation, mediation, conflict-analysis, and collaborative problem-solving skills. As a result, communities become proactive agents capable of managing disputes, reducing violence, and building long-term stability.

The Nexus between Lifelong Learning and Community Development

Lifelong learning plays a central role in advancing community development by strengthening human capital through the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and competencies that enhance productivity and social empowerment. It encourages democratic participation by equipping citizens with the civic awareness needed to engage meaningfully in local governance processes, demand accountability, and contribute to collective decision-making. Through continuous learning, communities also develop stronger social cohesion and collective efficacy, as individuals gain the capacity to collaborate, share knowledge, and work toward common development goals. Furthermore, lifelong learning supports adaptive leadership and innovation by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to respond to emerging socio-economic and environmental challenges (Ojo, 2023). In contexts where insecurity is rising, lifelong learning becomes even more essential as it equips residents with the analytical skills and mindset required to understand conflict drivers, appreciate diversity, and resist divisive narratives. By enhancing citizens' ability to interpret local dynamics and advocate for transparent governance, lifelong learning strengthens the social fabric and empowers communities to build resilience against violence, inequality, and instability.

Continuing Education, Community Peace and Security

Continuing education significantly contributes to community peace and security by providing structured opportunities for residents to acquire peace education and conflict management skills. Learning programs focused on negotiation, mediation, tolerance, and constructive dialogue help reduce interpersonal and intergroup tensions, thereby promoting nonviolent conflict resolution and harmonious coexistence (Usman & Gaya, 2024). These forms of education build the capacity of community members to manage disputes, address grievances, and participate in peace-building initiatives. Another important dimension of continuing education is its role in strengthening community policing and security awareness. Through sustained learning, community members become more informed about crime-prevention strategies, understand their responsibilities in maintaining safety, and collaborate more effectively with security agencies. This enhanced responsiveness improves the effectiveness of community policing initiatives and increases trust between residents and formal security actors. In the digital age, continuing education also enhances digital literacy, enabling individuals to critically evaluate information, verify sources, and resist manipulation. Misinformation and disinformation often fuel fear, panic, and violence, especially in fragile communities; therefore, digital literacy becomes a vital tool for safeguarding peace. Continuing education further supports youth engagement and prevents radicalization by providing young people with entrepreneurial and employability skills, social and emotional competencies, and opportunities for civic and leadership development. These interventions reduce youth vulnerability to extremist recruitment and reinforce positive community participation (Nwagu & Okorie, 2024). Additionally, sustained learning initiatives strengthen early warning and early response systems by empowering communities to recognize signs of conflict escalation, identify patterns

of insecurity, and mobilize timely responses. Knowledge gained through continuous education enhances community vigilance and enables proactive action that mitigates the spread of violence.

Policy and Practical Implications

For lifelong learning to effectively support community peace and security, several policy and practical considerations are necessary. Integrating peace and security studies into adult and community education curricula is essential, with topics such as conflict resolution, mediation, civic education, digital literacy, community policing, and disaster risk management forming critical components. Strengthening community learning centers also becomes a priority, as these hubs provide accessible spaces for capacity building, dialogue, and skill acquisition at the grassroots level. Partnerships with security agencies, NGOs, civil society groups, and traditional institutions are equally important, as they facilitate knowledge exchange and ensure coordinated responses to emerging security challenges. Collaborative frameworks promote trust, enhance communication, and align community-based efforts with broader peace and security strategies. Policy reforms are needed to support inclusive lifelong learning through increased funding for adult education, improved digital learning infrastructure, and the expansion of community-based training programs (Nwagu & Okorie, 2024).

Finally, empowering community development practitioners is crucial. These practitioners should be trained in peace-building methodologies, participatory communication, conflict-sensitive development planning, and community facilitation skills. Strengthening their competencies ensures that lifelong learning initiatives are effectively implemented and aligned with community needs, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace, security, and development.

Conclusion

Continuing education and lifelong learning are indispensable for strengthening community development, especially in contexts facing insecurity and conflict. They enable communities to understand their environment, build resilience, resist misinformation, and actively participate in peace and security initiatives. For Nigeria and other developing countries to achieve sustainable development, lifelong learning must be mainstreamed into community interventions and peace-building frameworks.

Recommendations

1. **Enhancing Understanding of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning**
In line with the first objective, policymakers and community development practitioners should prioritize sensitization programs to explain the concepts and relevance of continuing education and lifelong learning. Awareness campaigns, workshops, and community forums can help citizens recognize these frameworks as tools for sustainable development, civic engagement, and social empowerment.
 2. **Strengthening Civic Competencies and Community Participation.** Aligned with the second objective, lifelong learning initiatives should be designed to enhance civic
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competencies, social cohesion, and active participation in community development processes. Programs should include training on participatory governance, democratic engagement, collective problem-solving, and leadership skills to enable residents to engage meaningfully in local decision-making.

3. **Promoting Peace-building and Conflict-Resolution Skills.** In accordance with the third objective, continuing education programs should integrate peace education and conflict-management training. Communities should be equipped with negotiation, mediation, tolerance, and dialogue skills to reduce interpersonal and intergroup tensions. Local workshops and adult-education courses can serve as platforms to strengthen residents' capacities for proactive conflict prevention and resolution.
4. **Enhancing Digital Literacy and Combating Misinformation.** To meet the fourth objective, lifelong learning programs must prioritize digital literacy, particularly in verifying information, resisting manipulation, and countering misinformation that may escalate conflicts. Training on social media use, fact-checking, and early-warning reporting can empower communities to respond effectively to emerging security threats.
5. **Repositioning Lifelong Learning as a Tool for Sustainable Development, Peace, and Security**
Aligned with the fifth objective, governments, NGOs, and local institutions should implement strategies that integrate lifelong learning into broader community development and peace-building frameworks. This includes establishing community learning centers, strengthening practitioner capacities in participatory communication and conflict-sensitive planning, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure that continuing education contributes to sustainable development, social cohesion, and community security.

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