

## **CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND PEACEBUILDING AMONG DIVERSE ETHNIC GROUPS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria's rich ethnic and cultural diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for peacebuilding. This study explores the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering peace among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, examining how cultural initiatives can bridge divides and promote national unity. The study identifies key challenges, including ethnic and religious diversity, historical grievances, political manipulation, economic constraints, and security concerns. It emphasizes the significance of developing a comprehensive national cultural policy, promoting inclusive cultural initiatives, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, addressing historical grievances, investing in education, leveraging technology, and ensuring security. The study adopted Soft Power Theory and Social Identity Theory as the theoretical framework for analysis. This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary sources of data collection such as academic journals, government reports, and case studies of cultural diplomacy initiatives in Nigeria and other multicultural societies. The study employs a thematic method of data analysis to interpret the findings. The findings reveal that while cultural

diplomacy holds significant potential for fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, its effectiveness is contingent upon addressing these multifaceted challenges. The study recommends strategic actions, including the establishment of a national cultural policy, the promotion of representative cultural programs, enhanced stakeholder coordination, and increased investment in education and public awareness. The study concludes that there is a need for a coordinated and strategic approach to leverage Nigeria's cultural diversity as a force for unity and peace.

**Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Peacebuilding, Ethnic Diversity, National Policy, Nigeria**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million people, is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. It is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, each with its distinct language, culture, and traditions (Falola, 2021). The three largest ethnic groups—the Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast—dominate the political and socio-economic landscape, but numerous other ethnic communities also play significant roles in Nigeria's national identity. This rich cultural diversity, while offering a wealth of traditions, languages, and histories, has also been a source of tension and conflict. Ethnic rivalries and clashes have periodically erupted, leading to violence, socio-political instability, and economic disruption.

The legacy of British colonial rule has significantly shaped Nigeria's ethnic relations. Colonial administrators often manipulated ethnic identities for administrative convenience and control, leading to the creation of artificial boundaries and fostering divisions among ethnic groups (Okafor, 2016). The divide-and-rule tactics employed by the British entrenched ethnic identities and tensions, which were exacerbated by the competition for resources and political

power. The impact of these colonial policies is still felt today, as ethnic identity continues to influence Nigeria's politics and inter-group relations.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced several significant ethnic conflicts. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War (1967-1970), remains one of the most devastating examples, driven by ethnic divisions and political marginalization (Achebe, 2012). Also, conflicts in the Niger Delta, as well as inter-ethnic clashes in the Middle Belt and other regions, underscore the persistent challenges posed by ethnic diversity. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of lives, displacement of communities, and a cycle of mistrust and resentment among ethnic groups (Oluwadare, 2018). Hence, addressing these tensions is essential for Nigeria's stability and development.

Nigeria, with its immense ethnic diversity, faces significant challenges in fostering national unity and achieving lasting peace. While this diversity enriches Nigeria's cultural landscape, it has also been a source of recurrent ethnic conflicts and political tensions. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Nigeria have often focused on security measures, political settlements, and legal frameworks. However, these approaches have not sufficiently addressed the underlying socio-cultural factors contributing to ethnic tensions. They frequently provide short-term solutions that fail to create the lasting trust and mutual understanding necessary for sustained peace. The recurring nature of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria suggests that a new approach is needed—one that goes beyond political and security solutions to address the socio-cultural dimensions of conflict. Therefore, this need calls for the exploration of alternative peacebuilding tools, such as cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy, defined as using cultural exchanges and interactions to foster mutual understanding and respect, presents a viable solution for peacebuilding in a multicultural society like Nigeria (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy has been underexplored and underutilised in Nigeria's peacebuilding efforts despite its potential. While some initiatives, such as cultural festivals and inter-ethnic dialogues, have been implemented, their impact on reducing ethnic tensions and promoting national unity has not been systematically evaluated. Moreover, the challenges and limitations of using cultural diplomacy in Nigeria's context—such as political interference, ethnic favouritism, and inadequate funding—have not been adequately addressed.

The problem this study seeks to address is the underutilization of cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. There is a critical need to understand how cultural diplomacy can effectively bridge ethnic divides, promote intercultural dialogue, and foster peaceful coexistence. This study aims to fill the gap by examining the role of cultural diplomacy in Nigeria's peacebuilding efforts, identifying successful strategies, and proposing ways to overcome the challenges associated with its implementation. By focusing on cultural diplomacy, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding strategies in Nigeria. It aims to provide insights into how cultural diplomacy can be harnessed to transform Nigeria's ethnic diversity from a source of conflict into a foundation for national unity and development. This study seeks to explore this potential, providing insights and recommendations for leveraging cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding in Nigeria.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary sources of data collection such as academic journals, government reports, and case studies of cultural diplomacy initiatives in

Nigeria and other multicultural societies. The study employs a thematic method of data analysis to interpret the findings.

### **Understanding the Concept of Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy is a multifaceted concept that has garnered attention from various scholars and practitioners in the fields of international relations, cultural studies, and communication. The concept of cultural diplomacy has been poised as a potential tool for fostering peace and understanding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic communities. According to Nye (2004), cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural initiatives, exchanges, and dialogue to build bridges of understanding between different groups or nations. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which often focuses on political and economic negotiations, cultural diplomacy seeks to influence perceptions and attitudes by highlighting shared values, traditions, and experiences. It operates on the premise that cultural interaction can reduce prejudice, challenge stereotypes, and create a foundation for peaceful coexistence.

Otero (2020) argues that cultural diplomacy has evolved significantly in the context of globalization. She posits that it serves as a tool for nations to project their identity and values on a global stage while also engaging with diverse cultures to promote dialogue and collaboration. It involves the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and cultural expressions to build relationships, enhance cooperation, and promote mutual understanding (Cummings, 2019). The concept is grounded in the theory of soft power, which emphasizes the ability to influence others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion or force (Nye, 1990). Cultural diplomacy is seen as a vital tool for peacebuilding, particularly in multicultural and

multi-ethnic contexts, as it can help bridge cultural divides and reduce prejudices and stereotypes.

Cultural diplomacy encompasses a wide range of activities, including art exhibitions, language exchanges, cultural festivals, educational programs, and media collaboration (Mark, 2019). It leverages cultural heritage, the arts, and other cultural expressions to open dialogue and foster mutual respect among diverse groups. Scholars argue that cultural diplomacy can play a significant role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding by providing platforms for intercultural dialogue, promoting shared values, and highlighting common human experiences (Arndt, 2006). McConnell (2021) discusses how cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in shaping national identity. He asserts that through cultural exchanges and initiatives, countries can reinforce their narratives and enhance their international standing while simultaneously fostering goodwill among foreign populations. Sarah (2023) explores the impact of digital technology on cultural diplomacy. She argues that social media platforms have transformed traditional diplomatic practices by allowing for real-time engagement with global audiences, thus expanding the reach and effectiveness of cultural initiatives. Zohar (2022) highlights the potential of cultural diplomacy to bridge divides between conflicting parties. He suggests that shared cultural experiences can create empathy and understanding, thereby facilitating dialogue and peace-building efforts.

The use of cultural diplomacy is rooted in the theory of soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye to describe the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy leverages cultural assets—such as arts, music, language, and heritage—as instruments of engagement and influence. By promoting

cultural exchange and dialogue, it seeks to foster mutual respect and understanding, which are essential for peacebuilding. In multicultural societies, cultural diplomacy can serve as a platform for different ethnic groups to showcase their unique identities while finding common ground in shared human experiences. Authors like Melissen (2022) emphasize that cultural diplomacy is not merely about soft power but also involves strategic communication that can influence public opinion and policy decisions. The roots of cultural diplomacy can be traced back to historical practices where art and culture were used as tools for political negotiation. Cull (2023) argue that understanding the historical context is crucial for grasping how contemporary cultural diplomacy functions within global politics.

### **Historical Context of Cultural Diplomacy in Nigeria**

In the context of Nigeria, cultural diplomacy has a rich historical backdrop that intertwines with the nation's colonial past, post-independence identity formation, and contemporary global engagements. Historically, Nigeria's cultural diplomacy can be traced back to its pre-colonial era when various ethnic groups engaged in trade and cultural exchanges with neighbouring regions. The diverse cultures within Nigeria have contributed significantly to its cultural richness. This diversity has often been a focal point for diplomatic engagement, as Nigeria seeks to project its unique identity on the global stage. During the colonial period (late 19th century to mid-20th century), British colonial rule imposed significant changes on Nigerian society. The introduction of Western education and Christianity altered traditional practices and created new avenues for cultural exchange (Irele & Adeoti, 2021). However, this period also saw resistance movements that emphasized indigenous culture as a means of asserting national

identity. Cultural diplomacy during this time was largely reactive; it aimed at preserving local customs while negotiating the complexities of colonial rule.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was a concerted effort to redefine national identity through cultural diplomacy. The Nigerian government recognized culture as a vital tool for nation-building and international representation. Initiatives such as the establishment of the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) in 1975 aimed to promote Nigerian arts both domestically and internationally (Akinwunmi, 2022). This organization played a crucial role in showcasing Nigerian music, dance, literature, and visual arts at international festivals and exhibitions. The oil boom of the 1970s provided Nigeria with financial resources that further enabled its cultural diplomacy efforts. Ugochukwu (2023) asserts that the government invested in promoting Nigerian cinema (Nollywood), literature (with authors like Chinua Achebe gaining international acclaim), and music genres such as Afrobeat led by Fela Kuti. These cultural exports not only enhanced Nigeria's soft power but also facilitated dialogue with other nations (Ekwueme, 2021).

Furthermore, Nigeria has continued to leverage its rich cultural heritage as a diplomatic tool amidst globalization challenges. The rise of social media platforms has allowed for broader dissemination of Nigerian culture worldwide, fostering connections with diasporic communities and enhancing cross-cultural dialogues (Okafor & Uchechukwu, 2023). Moreover, Nigeria's participation in international organizations such as UNESCO highlights its commitment to using culture as a means of fostering peace and development globally. Cultural diplomacy initiatives have included collaborations with other nations on educational



programs, art exhibitions, and cultural festivals that celebrate diversity while promoting mutual respect.

### **The Rationale for Cultural Diplomacy in Nigeria**

Nigeria's complex ethnic landscape makes it a compelling case for the application of cultural diplomacy. The frequent ethnic conflicts, driven by competition over resources, political marginalization, and historical grievances, underscore the need for innovative approaches to peacebuilding. Traditional methods of conflict resolution, such as military interventions and legal frameworks, have often proved inadequate in addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions (Ojo, 2021). They may provide temporary relief but fail to build the trust and understanding necessary for long-term peace. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, offers a more holistic approach by addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of conflict.

Historically, Nigeria has utilized elements of cultural diplomacy through national cultural festivals, educational exchanges, and the promotion of indigenous languages and traditions. The National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), for instance, has been an important platform for showcasing the country's diverse cultural heritage and promoting national unity (Olayiwola, 2013). Such initiatives highlight the potential of cultural diplomacy to not only celebrate diversity but also to promote dialogue and interaction among different ethnic communities. By engaging in cultural diplomacy, Nigeria can harness its cultural diversity as a strength, turning potential sources of conflict into opportunities for collaboration and mutual enrichment.

Cultural diplomacy involves the use of cultural assets to promote mutual understanding and strengthen relationships between nations. In Nigeria's case, showcasing traditional crafts, contemporary art forms, and indigenous music can create an appreciation for the country's cultural wealth. Events such as the Lagos Carnival or the Osun-Osogbo Festival not only attract international attention but also instil national pride among Nigerians who see their culture recognized globally. This dual approach—promoting unity through diversity—can help forge a stronger national identity that resonates with both local and international audiences (Okeke-Uzodike & Nwankwo, 2017). Moreover, cultural diplomacy can serve as a platform for dialogue about Nigeria's multifaceted identity. Nwankwo (2020) opined that by engaging with global audiences through exhibitions, performances, and literary events, Nigeria can narrate its story in ways that highlight both its uniqueness and commonalities with other cultures. This narrative is essential in fostering an inclusive sense of belonging among Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds.

The historical context of ethnic tensions in Nigeria underscores the importance of conflict resolution strategies that leverage cultural diplomacy. Engaging in cultural exchanges can facilitate understanding between various ethnic groups within Nigeria as well as between Nigeria and other countries. Such exchanges promote dialogue through shared experiences that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. Cultural diplomacy initiatives—such as joint artistic projects or collaborative educational programs—can help bridge divides by fostering empathy and respect among different communities (Ezeani & Okwuosa, 2019). For instance, art exhibitions featuring works from diverse Nigerian artists can serve as a medium for storytelling that highlights shared experiences rather than differences. Similarly, musical collaborations

across ethnic lines can create new forms of expression that resonate with broader audiences while emphasizing unity.

### **The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Peacebuilding in Nigeria**

The use of cultural diplomacy in peacebuilding is based on the premise that cultural interactions can facilitate understanding, build trust, and create a sense of shared identity among conflicting parties (Snow, 2016). Cultural diplomacy emphasizes dialogue and exchange rather than imposition, making it a suitable approach for addressing the underlying socio-cultural factors that contribute to conflicts. By promoting cultural understanding and appreciation, cultural diplomacy can reduce the tensions that arise from ethnic and cultural differences (Wang, 2014).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in fostering peace and reconciliation. For example, in post-apartheid South Africa, cultural initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used storytelling and cultural expression to address historical injustices and promote healing among different racial and ethnic groups (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Similarly, in the Balkans, cultural diplomacy initiatives have played a crucial role in rebuilding relationships and trust among communities that experienced ethnic violence during the Yugoslav Wars (Bieber, 2006).

In today's digital age, media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions across cultures. Nigerian filmmakers, musicians, and artists have increasingly used their platforms to address social issues related to conflict and peacebuilding. By producing content that reflects the realities of life in Nigeria—while also promoting narratives of hope and reconciliation—these creators contribute significantly to cultural diplomacy efforts. Okafor (2020) stated that

television shows like “Tinsel” or films addressing themes of unity amidst diversity serve not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for social change by challenging divisive narratives prevalent in society. Cultural diplomacy can also strengthen community ties at the grassroots level. Local organizations often engage in cultural activities that bring together people from various backgrounds to collaborate on projects aimed at community development. These initiatives can include joint educational programs or community service projects that emphasize shared goals rather than differences. Akinyemi (2019) observed that by fostering collaboration through cultural activities, communities can build trust and solidarity among their members. This is essential for creating resilient societies capable of withstanding external pressures that may lead to conflict. As Nigeria continues to navigate its complex socio-political landscape, embracing cultural diplomacy will be essential for achieving lasting peace and stability.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A robust theoretical framework is essential for understanding the role of cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding among diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. This framework is grounded in two key theories: Soft Power Theory and Social Identity Theory. These theories provide insights into how cultural diplomacy can influence social relations and contribute to peacebuilding in a multi-ethnic context like Nigeria.

#### **Soft Power Theory**

Soft Power Theory, introduced by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century, is a central concept in international relations that contrasts with the notion of hard power (Nye, 1990; 2004). While

hard power relies on coercion and force (e.g., military strength, and economic sanctions), soft power achieves influence through attraction and persuasion. Soft power is derived from a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies, which can inspire and attract others to follow its lead (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy is a key component of soft power, as it involves the use of cultural assets to build relationships, promote mutual understanding, and influence the perceptions of others. In the context of Nigeria, cultural diplomacy can be employed to foster a sense of shared identity and common purpose among different ethnic groups, thus contributing to peacebuilding. By showcasing Nigeria's rich cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue, cultural diplomacy can help diminish stereotypes, reduce ethnic tensions, and create an environment conducive to peace (Cummings, 2019).

Soft Power Theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding how cultural diplomacy can serve as an attractive and non-coercive approach to conflict resolution. By leveraging cultural elements such as art, music, language, and shared heritage, Nigeria can influence its diverse ethnic groups to engage in peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. This theory underscores the importance of culture as a source of power and influence, highlighting how cultural diplomacy can be used strategically to achieve peacebuilding objectives.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, explains how individuals' self-concepts are derived from their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, people categorize themselves and others into groups (in-groups and out-groups) based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, language, or nationality.

These categorizations lead to social identification, where individuals derive part of their identity from their group membership. Social Identity Theory posits that in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination are common, as individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from relevant out-groups. This can lead to intergroup conflicts, especially in diverse societies where multiple groups compete for resources, recognition, and power (Hogg, 2016). In the Nigerian context, ethnic conflicts can be understood as manifestations of social identity dynamics, where different ethnic groups assert their identity and interests, often leading to tensions and confrontations.

Applying Social Identity Theory to this study helps to explain the underlying social and psychological processes that contribute to ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. It highlights the role of social identity in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards other ethnic groups. Cultural diplomacy can be seen as a tool to manage these social identities by fostering a superordinate identity that encompasses all ethnic groups. Through cultural exchanges, shared experiences, and the celebration of common values, cultural diplomacy can promote a sense of belonging to a larger Nigerian identity, thereby reducing the salience of divisive ethnic identities.

Overall, combining Soft Power Theory and Social Identity Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural diplomacy can be used as a tool for peacebuilding in Nigeria. Soft Power Theory offers insights into the mechanisms through which cultural diplomacy can influence perceptions and behaviours, while Social Identity Theory explains the social dynamics that contribute to ethnic conflicts and how these can be transformed. Soft Power Theory informs the strategic use of cultural diplomacy as a non-coercive means of

influencing ethnic groups towards peaceful coexistence. It highlights the potential of cultural initiatives to attract and persuade by showcasing Nigeria's cultural richness and diversity. Social Identity Theory provides a lens through which to understand the social-psychological aspects of ethnic conflict. It emphasizes the need for cultural diplomacy to address identity issues by promoting inclusive narratives that foster a shared national identity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

### **Challenges of Cultural Diplomacy and Peacebuilding among Diverse Ethnic Groups in Nigeria**

Cultural diplomacy, which uses cultural interactions to foster mutual understanding and build relationships, is an essential tool for peacebuilding, especially in ethnically diverse societies like Nigeria. However, implementing cultural diplomacy effectively in such a context presents several challenges. This section discusses the key challenges of using cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, drawing on relevant literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of these issues.

**Ethnic and Religious Diversity:** Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 indigenous languages (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This diversity, while a cultural asset, also poses significant challenges to cultural diplomacy. The complexity of ethnic identities can make it difficult to design and implement cultural diplomacy initiatives that are inclusive and representative of all groups. Moreover, the intersection of ethnic and religious identities often intensifies divisions, making it challenging to foster a sense of shared national identity. Ethnic and religious tensions are frequently fueled

by perceptions of marginalization and exclusion, leading to conflicts and undermining efforts to promote peace through cultural diplomacy (Adenrele, 2012).

**Historical Grievances and Mistrust:** Nigeria's history is marked by colonialism, civil war, and inter-ethnic conflicts, which have left deep-seated grievances and mistrust among different ethnic groups. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafran War, is a significant historical event that has contributed to lasting ethnic animosities, particularly between the Igbo and other ethnic groups (Korieh, 2012). These historical grievances are often passed down through generations, perpetuating a cycle of mistrust and resentment. Cultural diplomacy efforts must therefore navigate these historical sensitivities carefully. Initiatives perceived as favouring one ethnic group over others can quickly backfire, exacerbating rather than alleviating tensions.

**Political Manipulation and Ethnic Favouritism:** The politicization of ethnic identities in Nigeria presents a significant challenge to cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts. Political leaders often exploit ethnic and religious identities to mobilize support, which can deepen divisions and hinder reconciliation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). This manipulation can undermine cultural diplomacy initiatives, as they may be viewed with suspicion and seen as extensions of political agendas rather than genuine efforts to promote peace. Ethnic favouritism in the allocation of resources and political appointments further entrenches divisions and creates obstacles to building trust among different ethnic communities.

**Lack of Coordination and Policy Frameworks:** Effective cultural diplomacy requires a coordinated approach involving various stakeholders, including government agencies, cultural institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners. However, in Nigeria, there



is often a lack of coordination and coherent policy frameworks to guide cultural diplomacy initiatives (Nweke, 2019). This lack of coordination leads to fragmented efforts, duplication of initiatives, and inefficient use of resources. Without a clear policy framework, cultural diplomacy programs may lack direction and fail to address the specific needs of diverse ethnic groups. The absence of a strategic national cultural policy that integrates cultural diplomacy into broader peacebuilding efforts limits the effectiveness of these initiatives.

**Economic Constraints and Resource Allocation:** Economic challenges pose significant barriers to the implementation of cultural diplomacy initiatives. Nigeria faces various economic issues, including poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment, which limit the government's ability to fund and support cultural diplomacy programs adequately (Oloruntoba, 2018). Limited financial resources mean that cultural initiatives may not reach all parts of the country, particularly rural and underserved areas where ethnic tensions may be more pronounced. Additionally, economic hardships can exacerbate ethnic tensions, as competition for scarce resources often aligns with ethnic lines, further complicating efforts to promote peace through cultural diplomacy.

**Social and Cultural Barriers:** Entrenched stereotypes, prejudices, and cultural barriers can undermine the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy initiatives. Ethnic groups may have deeply rooted negative perceptions of one another, which are often reinforced by historical conflicts and cultural differences (Ukiwo, 2003). Overcoming these perceptions requires long-term efforts to change attitudes and behaviours, which can be challenging in a context where ethnic identity is a core aspect of social life. Moreover, cultural practices and norms may vary significantly among different ethnic groups, making it difficult to find common cultural

grounds upon which to build peacebuilding initiatives. Initiatives that fail to respect and understand these cultural differences may be viewed as intrusive or irrelevant.

**Security Concerns:** Security concerns, including the threat of terrorism, banditry, and ethnic violence, pose significant challenges to cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts. In regions where security is a concern, it can be difficult to organize cultural diplomacy events, and participants may be reluctant to engage in intercultural dialogue. The presence of violent extremist groups, such as Boko Haram in the northeastern part of Nigeria, further complicates efforts to promote peace and cultural understanding (Onuoha, 2014). Security concerns also divert resources and attention away from cultural diplomacy initiatives towards immediate security needs, limiting the scope and impact of peacebuilding efforts.

Overall, the challenges of cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups are multifaceted and interconnected. Ethnic and religious diversity, historical grievances, political manipulation, lack of coordination, economic constraints, social barriers, and security concerns all pose significant obstacles to the successful implementation of cultural diplomacy initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves not only cultural diplomacy but also political, economic, and social reforms. It also necessitates the involvement of various stakeholders, including government, civil society, and the international community, to create an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation. Only through a coordinated and inclusive effort can cultural diplomacy effectively contribute to building lasting peace among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

**The Way Forward: Addressing Challenges of Cultural Diplomacy and Peacebuilding among Diverse Ethnic Groups in Nigeria**

To effectively utilize cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, it is essential to address the challenges identified earlier. These challenges range from ethnic and religious diversity, historical grievances, and political manipulation to economic constraints, social barriers, and security concerns. The way forward involves a multi-faceted approach that incorporates strategic policy frameworks, inclusive cultural initiatives, enhanced stakeholder collaboration, and robust education programs. The following discussion outlines key strategies for overcoming these challenges, drawing on relevant academic and policy literature.

**Developing a Comprehensive National Cultural Policy:** A coherent and inclusive national cultural policy is crucial for guiding cultural diplomacy efforts in Nigeria. This policy should emphasize the promotion of cultural diversity while fostering a sense of national identity and unity. It should provide a framework for coordinating cultural diplomacy initiatives, ensuring that they are inclusive, representative, and sensitive to the diverse cultural and ethnic makeup of the country. The policy should also integrate cultural diplomacy into broader national development and peacebuilding strategies, recognizing culture as a vital component of social and economic development (Nweke, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). The Nigerian government, in collaboration with cultural institutions and civil society organizations, should develop and implement a comprehensive cultural policy. This policy should outline clear objectives, strategies, and implementation mechanisms for cultural diplomacy, including funding provisions and evaluation criteria.

**Promoting Inclusive Cultural Initiatives:** For cultural diplomacy to be effective, it must be inclusive and representative of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. This involves designing cultural

initiatives that celebrate the country's cultural diversity while promoting shared values and common heritage. Programs such as inter-ethnic cultural festivals, arts exhibitions, and cultural exchange programs should be organized to facilitate intercultural dialogue and understanding (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These initiatives should provide platforms for different ethnic groups to showcase their cultures, engage in dialogue, and build relationships. Cultural initiatives should be carefully designed to ensure representation from all ethnic groups. They should focus on themes that promote national unity and address common challenges, such as peace, development, and human rights. The government and cultural organizations should support local cultural events that bring together different communities, fostering grassroots peacebuilding.

**Enhancing Collaboration among Stakeholders:** Effective cultural diplomacy requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, cultural institutions, civil society, community leaders, and international organizations. A collaborative approach ensures that cultural diplomacy initiatives are well-coordinated, adequately funded, and aligned with the needs and aspirations of different ethnic groups (Kerr, 2017). Stakeholder collaboration also enhances the legitimacy and credibility of cultural diplomacy efforts, as it involves diverse voices and perspectives. Establish inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder platforms to coordinate cultural diplomacy efforts. Encourage partnerships between government, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies to leverage resources, expertise, and networks. Foster community involvement by engaging local leaders and organizations in planning and implementing cultural diplomacy initiatives.

**Addressing Historical Grievances and Promoting Reconciliation:** To build sustainable peace, it is essential to address historical grievances and foster reconciliation among Nigeria's ethnic groups. This can be achieved through truth-telling, dialogue, and restorative justice processes that acknowledge past injustices and promote healing (Korieh, 2012). Cultural diplomacy can play a role in these processes by creating spaces for dialogue and understanding, allowing communities to express their histories, grievances, and aspirations. Implement programs that promote truth-telling and reconciliation, such as historical exhibitions, oral history projects, and public dialogues. Support initiatives that document and disseminate the diverse histories of Nigeria's ethnic groups, highlighting their contributions to the nation. Encourage cultural expressions that foster empathy, understanding, and healing.

**Education and Awareness Programs:** Education is a powerful tool for promoting cultural understanding and peace. Integrating cultural education into the school curriculum can help young Nigerians appreciate their country's cultural diversity and develop respect for different ethnic groups. Educational programs should also focus on teaching the values of tolerance, non-violence, and mutual respect. Media and public awareness campaigns can complement these efforts by promoting positive narratives about Nigeria's cultural diversity and the importance of peaceful coexistence (Ukiwo, 2003). Revise the educational curriculum to include content on Nigeria's cultural diversity, history, and the importance of peacebuilding. Develop extracurricular activities, such as cultural clubs and exchange programs, to promote intercultural learning. Launch media campaigns that highlight successful examples of inter-ethnic cooperation and harmony.

**Leveraging Technology and Social Media:** In the digital age, technology and social media offer powerful tools for cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding. They provide platforms for cultural exchange, dialogue, and the dissemination of positive messages about cultural diversity. Social media can be used to reach a broad audience, particularly young people, and engage them in conversations about peace and cultural understanding (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). Develop online platforms and social media campaigns that promote intercultural dialogue and showcase Nigeria's cultural diversity. Encourage youth participation in digital storytelling projects that share positive stories of inter-ethnic cooperation. Use technology to connect communities across the country, enabling virtual cultural exchanges and interactions.

**Ensuring Security and Stability:** Security is a prerequisite for successful cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding. Efforts to promote cultural understanding must be complemented by measures to ensure the safety and security of communities. This involves addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, and strengthening law enforcement and justice systems to protect citizens from violence and exploitation (Onuoha, 2014). Implement comprehensive security strategies that address the underlying socio-economic issues contributing to insecurity. Enhance the capacity of security agencies to prevent and respond to violence. Create safe spaces for cultural diplomacy activities, ensuring that participants can engage in dialogue and exchange without fear.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the role of cultural diplomacy in peacebuilding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, identifying both the significant potential and the considerable challenges associated with this approach. The findings highlight the critical role that cultural diplomacy

can play in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among Nigeria's ethnically and culturally diverse populations. However, the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding is contingent upon addressing a range of complex and interconnected challenges. Cultural diplomacy is a vital instrument for promoting intercultural dialogue and building national unity. It provides a platform for different ethnic groups to engage with one another, celebrate their shared heritage, and address common issues. By highlighting and celebrating cultural diversity, cultural diplomacy can contribute to reducing ethnic tensions and fostering a more cohesive society.

The study identifies several challenges that hinder the successful implementation of cultural diplomacy in Nigeria. These include the complexity of ethnic and religious diversity, historical grievances, political manipulation, lack of coordinated policy frameworks, economic constraints, social and cultural barriers, and security concerns. Each of these factors poses significant obstacles to building effective and inclusive cultural diplomacy programs. The study underscores the need for a coordinated and strategic approach to cultural diplomacy in Nigeria. Policymakers, cultural institutions, and community leaders must work together to create and implement programs that address the specific needs and challenges of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. By fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding, cultural diplomacy can contribute to the broader goal of achieving lasting peace and national cohesion.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding among diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria:

1. There is a need to develop and enforce a national cultural policy that provides a clear framework for cultural diplomacy initiatives. This policy should prioritize the representation and inclusion of all ethnic groups and integrate cultural diplomacy into broader peacebuilding and national development strategies.
2. There is a need to design and implement cultural diplomacy programs that reflect Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity. Initiatives should focus on celebrating cultural heritage, fostering intercultural dialogue, and addressing common societal challenges.
3. There is a need to foster collaboration among government agencies, cultural institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners to enhance the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy. Establish multi-stakeholder platforms to coordinate and support cultural diplomacy initiatives.
4. There is a need to integrate cultural education into the national curriculum and launch public awareness campaigns to promote cultural understanding and tolerance. By incorporating cultural education into school curricula, young people can learn about the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria and develop respect for different ethnic groups. Public awareness campaigns can further support these efforts by highlighting positive examples of inter-ethnic cooperation and promoting messages of peace and unity.

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