An Interface of the Old Testament Concept of *Shalom* and the *Esan* Socio-Cultural Concept of *Ọfure*: Its Implications for Holistic Societal Development

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Abstract

This paper explores the interface between the Old Testament concept of shalom and the Esan socio-cultural notion of ọfure. Shalom and ọfure encompass peaceful community, justice, wholeness, right relationships, harmony and overall well-being. A framework of relational cosmology, transformational development, and conflict transformation was adopted. Qualitative methods, including textual analysis of Scriptures and Esan oral traditions were used. Interviews and community case studies reveal that Esan elders conceptualise ọfure as peace in justice, well-being, and social harmony, maintained through restorative mediation. The integration of shalom and ọfure paradigms is apt for holistic development and enhanced social harmony in Esan land.

Keywords: Shalom, Esan, Ọfure, Iruekpen, Irrua, restorative cosmology

1 Introduction

Across the ancient world and into the present, the pursuit of peace signified more than mere absence of war or conflict; it represented a dynamic, holistic aspiration towards community well-being—mental, spiritual, social, and economic. The Old Testament concept of *Shalom* and the *Esan* socio-cultural notion of *Ọfure* each encapsulate this multidimensional vision, although articulated through disparate historical experiences and worldviews. Examining these concepts not only enriches the understanding of peace from both biblical and African perspectives but also foregrounds their relevance for contemporary models of holistic societal development.

Within the Hebrew scriptures *shalom* emerges as an all-encompassing ideal. It is frequently described as wholeness, soundness, and the restoration of right relationships between people, as between humanity and God (Brueggemann 2014; Owan 2021). Scholars pointed out that *shalom* fundamentally undergirds the Old Testament's notion of justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*takah*), linking personal well-being with communal peace. Thus, when the prophet laments that the leaders proclaimed "peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14), he critiques a superficial harmony lacking justice and genuine reconciliation. According to modern biblical scholarship, true *shalom* requires structural justice and promoting equitable access to resources (Wright 2004). Empirical data from the United Nations Human Development Index (UNDP 2023) substantiate that societies emphasising social equity and justice—practical out workings of *shalom*—register higher indices of well-being, underscoring the enduring efficacy of biblical peace principles in guiding holistic development initiatives.

Parallel to this, the *Esan* concept of *ọfure* in southern Nigeria, codified in proverbs, rituals, and social practices, connotes not just peace, but a state of mutuality, balance, and collective aspirations (Edebiri 2021). Traditionally, *ọfure* is considered indispensable for community survival; it is believed that the absence of it results in disruptions, disease, and

misfortune. *Esan* elders preside over conflict resolution processes which reinforce *ofure* through truth-telling, compensation, and communal rituals. According to recent fieldwork in Edo State (Obanor, Iyobosa, & Omorodion 2022), *Esan* communities that retain traditional *ofure*-oriented governance structures report 19% fewer violent incidents compared to neighbouring areas like *Afemai* and *Bini* communities to the northeast and south of *Esan* respectively, Niger Delta Weekly, July 2023.The convergence of *shalom* and *ofure* finds synergy in their prioritisation of justice, shared prosperity, and deep social bonds. Both conceptual systems regard poverty, exclusion, or unresolved conflict as subversions not only of social order but of ultimate well-being. In recent Nigerian experience, rising ethnic, economic disparities and violent extremism such as the *Boko Haram* and *Fulani* Militia religious violence, and the Niger Delta Avengers, which is basically socio-cultural, highlight the urgent need for such multidimensional approaches. For example, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2023) reports that multidimensional poverty currently afflicts 63% of Nigerians, with the biggest deficits in education, health, and living standards.

Critically, holistic societal development, in line with these frameworks, is not reducible to GDP growth or infrastructure expansion. Rather, it incorporates the role of subjective well-being, social trust, and local governance in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2023). Both *shalom* and *ofure* challenge technocratic models that ignore the cultural and ethical underpinnings of society. The 2022 Afrobarometer survey notes that citizens in communities with strong indigenous conflict resolution and social support mechanisms report higher levels of trust in local institutions and a greater sense of security (Afrobarometer 2022). Integrating the lessons embedded in *shalom* and *ofure* can, therefore, inform innovative policy interventions. These might include the embedding of restorative justice practices in legal systems, fostering community ownership of development projects, and investing in education models that affirmed both moral and communal values. International development organisations increasingly recognise that sustainable peace is best achieved by aligning global best practices with indigenous worldviews (UNDP 2023). For Nigeria and other multi-ethnic societies, recognising the compatibility and complementarities of biblical and Afrocentric peace traditions helps bridge divides, foster empathy, and support inclusive governance (Ajere 2012).

Thus, the interface between Old Testament *shalom* and the *Esan ofure* not only reveals their rich conceptual contents but also provides a robust, culturally grounded foundation for addressing contemporary challenges of holistic development. By foregrounding interconnectedness, justice, and the well-being of all, these traditions supply vital resources for policy-makers, religious leaders, and civil society actors engaged in building peaceful, flourishing societies.

1.1 *Statement of the Problem*

Despite significant efforts to address Nigeria's developmental challenges, the country continues to face deep-seated issues such as persistent social fractures, rising insecurity, and a lack of sustainable, holistic development. A critical factor contributing to these challenges is the marginalisation of indigenous and biblical peace paradigms, such as the concept of *shalom* in the Old Testament and *ofure* in Esan culture. These peace models, which emphasise justice, reconciliation, communal well-being, and spiritual fulfillment, have been largely ignored in favour of development strategies that prioritize material prosperity, GDP growth, and economic expansion.

Nigeria's current development framework, rooted in Westernised, economistic approaches, neglects the cultural and spiritual dimensions that are integral to long-term peace and social cohesion. This disregard for community-based, culturally rooted peace paradigms has exacerbated social divisions, as evidenced by the persistent ethnic and religious violence in the country. For instance, in the Niger Delta, the rise of militant groups like the Niger Delta Avengers is partly a response to the neglect of local traditions and grievances, which could be addressed through the community-centered frameworks of *ofure* and *shalom.*

The current policies in Nigeria, which often focus on top-down, centralized solutions, fail to address the root causes of conflict, namely, the erosion of social trust, exclusion, and cultural alienation. Instead of fostering dialogue and reconciliation, these policies have relied on military interventions, punitive measures, and institutionalized corruption, all of which have only deepened the sense of alienation and insecurity among local communities. There is, therefore, an urgent need to revisit Nigeria's development paradigm, integrating indigenous peace concepts like *shalom* and *ofure* alongside modern governance and economic strategies. By doing so, the country can address the root causes of its social and political crises, offering a more holistic approach to peace and development that is rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and communal values of its diverse people.

1.2 *Objectives of the Study*

The main objectives of this seminar paper are to:
i. Analyse the Old Testament concept of *shalom* and the *Esan* socio-cultural concept of *ofure* in their full dimensions.
ii. Identify the convergences and divergences between these two peace paradigms.
iii. Assess how the integration of *shalom* and *ofure* can inform holistic societal peace and development in multi-ethnic African contexts, with a focus on empirical evidence from Edo State.
iv. To offer recommendations for development policy, education, and interfaith or intercultural dialogue based on this analysis.

1.3 *Significance of Study*

This study addresses a notable lacuna by systematically integrating the Old Testament's concept of *shalom* with the *Esan* cultural principle of *ofure*, thereby contributing a rare comparative perspective to the discourse on peace-building and holistic development (Akinola 2018; Alawode 2022). By bridging biblical scholarship and African indigenous studies, it not only enriches theological inquiry but also offers a robust framework for interpreting peace in multi-ethnic, post-colonial contexts. Socially, the relevance of this research is profound, as both concepts go far beyond absence of conflict to encompass notions of justice, restoration, and communal flourishing — qualities in urgent demand in contemporary Nigerian society and many similar settings ravaged by social fragmentation and historical injustices such as the Nigerian Civil war, the post-coup violence and pogroms of 1966, the military rule and the injustices of the period (Brueggemann 2014; Obayemi 2021).

Developmentally, anchoring policies and interventions in the values espoused by *shalom* and *ofure* reorients the practice of development toward inclusivity, equity, and lasting societal peace, closely aligning with targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasises peace, justice, and strong institutions (UNDP 2022). Finally, this investigation

generates actionable insights for policymakers, faith leaders, and educators, encouraging the design and implementation of locally grounded, culturally resonant strategies for peace building, civic trust, and sustainable growth. Thus, the significance of the study not only in theoretical synthesis but in its potential for shaping transformative practice at multiple levels of society.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework. It weaves together perspectives from relational cosmology, transformational development, and peace and conflict studies. Each framework offers distinctive theoretical insights, influential authors, foundational tenets, and a unique relevance to the subject of holistic societal development in multi-ethnic and postcolonial contexts like Nigeria. The integration of these theories is crucial to understanding how spiritual, cultural, material, and relational dimensions can inform peace building and sustainable development.

2.1 *Relational Cosmology*

Relational cosmology forms the bedrock of the biblical understanding of *shalom* and the indigenous Africa worldview encapsulated in *ofure*. As illuminated by thinkers such as Tu Wei-Ming and the African theologian Bujo, relational cosmology describes a paradigm in which existence is conceived as an intricate web of relationships that bind humanity, the divine, nature, and wider society in a state of ongoing mutual interdependence (Bujo 2005; Küng 2005). In African thought, this interconnection is vividly captured by the maxim, "I am because we are," (Membe-Matale 2015). "I am Ubuntu," which underscores that individual identity and well-being are inseparable from the flourishing of the community. Küng (2005) in his spiritual reflections pointed that the root of *shalom* in Hebrew tradition also lies in this relational vision, where justice, harmony, and peace arise from properly ordered interactions among individuals, God, and the environment.

The guiding principles of relational cosmology focus on the interconnectivity of all dimensions of life, spiritual, social, and ecological. Communal wellbeing takes precedence over isolated individual pursuits, and the disruption of relational equilibrium, manifested through conflict, injustice, or environmental harm, inevitably leads to holistic disease. This lens is directly pertinent to the present study, as the study posits that "peace" is not simply a matter of individual serenity or a temporary halt in conflict, but the ongoing, dynamic flourishing of all beings within an interconnected relational network hence, *shalom* and *ofure* are deeply rooted in this cosmological orientation. *Shalom* signifies wholeness and completeness (Brueggemann 2014), while *ofure* in *Esan* cultural practice denotes a state of communal harmony, where spiritual, social, and ecological factors exist in concert (Edebiri 2021).

2.2 *Transformational Development Model*

The Transformational Development Model is most thoroughly articulated by Bryant L. Myers (2011) in his work *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development.* It builds on relational cosmology to advance a holistic vision of societal progress.

Myers, alongside other African scholars such as (Anyamele 2019, critiques the prevalent mainstream development approaches for their excessive focus on economic indicators, which often neglect the deeper spiritual, psychological, relational, and cultural dimension of human well-being. According to Myers (2021), transformational development is defined as the process whereby individuals and communities move toward restored relationships with God, self, others, and the environment, signalling a comprehensive restoration of life in all its facets.

The relevance of the Transformational Development Model to the themes of *shalom* and *ọfure* is significant because the biblical ideal of *shalom* and the *Esan* concept of *ọfure* are intrinsically transformational: each envisions peace as inseparable from justice, reconciliation, and restoration. In these frameworks, peace is realised not through the mere absence of conflict but through the active processes of communal healing, social reintegration, and the affirmation of collective values. Myers' schema offers a framework for how the intersection of theology and culture can inform effective development practice, not as a top-down imposition of material aid, but as a participatory journey toward wholeness, equity, and resilience. Anyamele (2019) reinforces this perspective in the African context, arguing that the omission of indigenous spiritual such as the nexus to the spirit world, practice of ritual and ceremonies, sacred specialists and sacred spaces and objects and social resources is a major contributor to policy failure and enduring social unrest on the continent.

2.3 *Peace and Conflict Studies: Lederach's Conflict Transformation*

Peace and Conflict Studies offer valuable theoretical grounding for this investigation, particularly through the influential work of John Paul Lederach and his model of "conflict." In his seminal text, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997), Lederach redirects the traditional focus from merely managing or resolving conflict to fundamentally transforming it. Central to his theory is the idea that enduring peace is not achieved just by silencing violence or temporarily resolving disputes. Rather, it requires the creation, restoration and maintenance of right relationships at personal, communal, and structural levels. Lederach argues that lasting peace necessitates a profound transformation in how individuals and groups perceive and interact with one another, as well as how societies address the underlying causes of conflict.

This theoretical orientation is especially pertinent to the study at hand with an emphasis on relational transformation closely mirrors the biblical notion of *shalom,* which envisions peace as a reality rooted in justice and aligns with the *Esan* understanding of *ọfure*, attained through community reconciliation and restorative justice that focusses on repairing the damage or harm caused by criminal behaviour of a person. Lederach's advocacy for grassroots, locally owned peace building processes resonates strongly with *Esan* indigenous protocols for nurturing *ọfure* with the Old Testament's restorative emphases. Employing Lederach's framework enables the study to critically examine the limitations of externally imposed or elite-driven peace interventions, advocating instead for approaches that valorise local wisdom, narrative traditions, rituals, and theological resources as essential for authentic societal healing.

2.4 *Synthesis and Relevance to Study*

By employing relational cosmology, transformational development, and conflict transformation, this theoretical framework equips the research with multidimensional analytical tools for examining the interfaces of *shalom* and *ọfure*. This theoretical triangulation

is particularly apt for the Nigerian and broader African context, where the alienation produced by colonialism, modernisation, and economic centrism has frayed the fabric of trust, harmony, and spiritual vitality. The synthesis of these theories provides a robust template for sculpting holistic, locally owned models of peace and development. It enables a departure from generic, universalising formulas toward contextually grounded interventions that are both theologically sound and culturally resonant. The relevance to policymakers, development practitioners, religious leaders, and indigenous authorities is thus immediate and profound, as it highlights pathways for integrating faith, tradition, and contemporary policy in the urgent work of building peaceful, just, and thriving societies.

3 Literature Review

3.1 *Shalom in the Old Testament*

Far transcending the simple meaning of "peace" as the absence of conflict, the Hebrew *shalom* is a richly textured term that unfolds as a vision of total well-being, spiritual, social, ecological, and economic. According to Brueggemann (2024), *shalom* serves as "the central vision of the Scriptures the outgrowth of justice, security, and harmony." It captures the essence of God's desired order for creation. Old Testament usage of *shalom,* occurring over 250 times, attests to its significance within Israel's covenantal imagination and social practice.

Biblical verses bolster this multidimensional understanding. Isaiah 32:17-18 declares, "The fruit of that righteousness will be [*shalom*]; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." Here, *shalom* is presented not as mere cessation of hostility, but as the lasting result of justice (*tsedek*) and right relationships. Similarly, Psalm 122:6-7 links *shalom* with security: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.'" In Jeremiah 33:6, the concept carries a strong association with health and well-being: "I will bring it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security." In each instance, *shalom* goes beyond freedom from peril, it gestures towards flourishing, restoration, and holistic health.

Moreover, *shalom* is at the heart of biblical vision of social reconciliation and community renewal. Micah 4:1-4 prophesies a time when "nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree and no one will make them afraid." This powerful eschatological vision ties *shalom* directly to the eradication of fear, the cultivating of justice, the restoration of harmonious human-divine and human-human relationships. Owan (2021) and Alawode (2022) underscore recent theological emphases that describe *shalom* as "a dynamic of wholeness that includes right relationships with God, others, self, and creation." Likewise, Wright (2018) stresses that biblical *shalom* is inherently communal—a social good realized through systems of justice, neighbourliness and economic equity.

Hence, the Old Testament *shalom* is not a passive or abstract ideal. It is an active, transformative state rooted in justice and sustained by right relationships. Its repeated invocation in scripture is a call to restorative action that addresses the interconnectedness of justice, security, reconciliation, and well-being, making it a foundational concept for holistic peace and flourishing society.

3.2 Ọfure in Esan Culture

In *Esan* culture, *ọfure* is not merely an abstract ideal but a living reality, woven into the fabric of daily life, language, and social institutions. As Omoera (2019) observes, *ọfure* transcends the simplistic notion of absence of conflict and instead entails a process of mutual respect, interconnectedness, dialogue, and intentional pursuit of social harmony. This ethos is deeply reflected in the proverbial and oral traditions of the *Esan* people, shaping collective consciousness and influencing patterns of interpersonal and communal relationships.

Esan proverbs function as vessels of cultural wisdom and are prominent vehicles for transmitting the values embedded in *ọfure*. For example, the proverb "*ọmọ nọ guani ọfure, ọreho emọni si ediọn*" ("The child that seeks peace must listen to the words of elders") highlights the centrality of generational dialogue and mediation in cultivating peace. This syntactic structure places the subject (*omon*, child), the verb phrase (*guani ọfure*, seeks), and the imperative (*ọreho emọni si ediọn,* listens to elders' words) in a sequential, causative relationship, underscoring that true peace emerges through active listening and respect for communal authority. Such proverbs guide social behaviour and underline that peace is intergenerational and dialogical rather than a solitary achievement.

Further, *ọfure* frequently appears in *Esan* greetings. The morning greeting "*Ọfure deba ei elena*" (May peace be with you this day) or its extended variant "*Ọfure dibhi ijogbe no sea*" (May peace not depart from your dwelling) illustrates how the invocation of peace is habitual, embedded in routine social exchanges. The formulaic syntax used here, imperative verb ("may peace"), the subject (*ọfure*), the action or wish ("be with you; not depart"), and the object ("this day; your dwelling") creates a performative utterance that sustains psychological well-being and social cohesion. In *Esan* marriages (*iriokhuo*), the blessing "*Ọfure de ba uwa ei*" (May peace envelope the home) is spoken by elders and women, signifying that the stability and prosperity of marriage are contingent on continuous, active maintenance of peaceful relations (Odeh 2020).

The genre of folktales (*okha*) and narratives features *ọfure* as a thematic motif and dramatic resolution. Stories often depict characters who by choosing dialogue, generosity, and truth, restore peace to the community, earning spiritual and material rewards. In the well-known narrative of "Zamien and the Broken Calabash," the protagonist's refusal to retaliate leads to communal reconciliation and collective celebration, teaching that true strength is measured by restraint and the pursuit of *ọfure.*

Pragmatically, *ọfure* serves as a foundation for *Esan* conflict resolution. Odeh (2020) documented that more than 85% of rural interpersonal and communal disputes in *Esan* land are settled through restorative dialogue, arbitration by a council of elders, or reconciliation rituals whereby the council of *enijies* (kings) enact common laws concerning issues peace and reconciliations, modes of address that prioritise truth-telling, restitution, and public apology rather than retribution. The proverb "*ọnọkọ ọfure, ọi mio ovan*" ("He who plants peace reaps no quarrel") is often cited to remind disputing parties that sowing peace yields lasting benefit, whereas abandoning it brings strife and misfortune.

This system's effectiveness is verifiable not in oral accounts but by patterns of kinship ties, as attested by anthropological research (Odeh 2020; Aghedo 2019). The prominence of *ọfure* language, proverbs, greetings, and narrative structures evokes a culture in which peace is continually enacted, reinforced by both syntax and genre and celebrated communally.

3.3 *Esan Illustrative Case Studies and Proverbs/Parables*

The *Esan* people provide rich illustrative case studies that demonstrate how traditional concepts of *ọfure,* peace and harmony are instantiated in communal life, particularly through mediation, ritual, and proverbial wisdom. These case studies highlight how indigenous approaches not only resolve immediate conflicts but also foster enduring social trust and collective well-being, aligning with the conceptual framework of holistic peace and *shalom* under consideration.

The land dispute resolution in *Uromi* (*Esan* North-East LGA) in 2021 serves as a vivid example. Rather than resorting to adversarial litigation, the feuding *Ojiefo* and *Ediale* families sought the counsel of the *Onojie* and the council of elders, reaffirming the centrality of traditional authorities in *Esan* society. The process was marked by public truth-telling, the ritual sharing of kola nut and the drinking of palm wine and the invocation proverbs like "*ọfure ai ribhu uwa, ọkugbe ki ai ribhi ẹbho*" ("With peace in a home, harmony reigns in the house/village"). Such linguistic artistry is not merely symbolic, but also performative in helping participants internalise communal obligations and responsibility to collective obligation or responsibility. The mediation's outcome, involving boundary adjustment, gift exchange, and a communal celebration, results in restitution with social reintegration. This process fostered not only satisfaction but also a renewed sense of kinship, underscoring *ọfure's* effectiveness in achieving restorative justice and sustainable harmony.

A second case centres on the *Irhuen-Ọfure* ceremony in *Ẹguare* and *Idumebo* communities in Irrua. Responding to youth-related tensions, community elders initiated a gathering at the village square, incorporating acts of collective sweeping and symbolic disposal of "pebbles" or disruptions. The public recitation of proverbs, such as "*Ọmọn bi ọfure ei sabọ re dia ki eyan"* ("Children and peace cannot coexist with bitterness"), reinforced the necessity of unity and forgiveness. The planting of a "peace tree" at the culmination of the ritual signified both closure and a new communal beginning, embedding the values of reconciliation in a living, growing form. The *Esan* Cultural Documentation Project (2022) quantitatively confirms the significance of such ceremonies: communities practising annual *irhuen-ọfure* reported markedly fewer violent conflicts and heightened cooperation, clearly indicating that cultural rituals undergird social stability and resilience.

A third case relates to domestic relations, showcasing *ọfure's* role within the sphere. Disputes among young couples, such as the example from Ekpoma involving a quarrel over farm proceeds, are typically mediated by extended family elders wielding ancestral wisdom in proverbs like "*ji ọfure kodalo ni mọi khia"* ("Let peace lead, so that our house will not lean"). Through patient narration of grievances and communal dialogue, estranged parties are encouraged toward conciliation and shared responsibility. The swift and peaceful reconciliation affirmed by the couple reflects confidence in and the transformative power of collective elder-led mediation and proverbial guidance.

More importantly, such stories and maxims mirror the Old Testament emphasis on *shalom* as a communal, restorative condition (Isaiah 32:17–18; Psalm 133:1), rather than merely the absence of war. Traditional *Esan* conflict resolution typically emphasises forgiveness, restitution, and ritual approaches closely aligned with biblical peacemaking (Matthew 5:9; 2 Corinthians 13:11), demonstrating that peace is a life, practical reality, not merely an ideal (Elugbe & Omoruyi 2018).

3.4 *Comparative Approaches and Gaps*

Recent comparative scholarship has made strides in juxtaposing biblical constructs such as *shalom* with indigenous African notions of peace, like *ofure*, yet clear gaps remain in depth and breadth. Studies by Obayemi (2021) and Adetoye (2022) have explored commonalities and differences, but they tend to confine their analyses to thematic or localised case studies without extending to broader societal impacts or comprehensive empirical backing. This has resulted in a fragmented academic landscape where the nuanced intersections between theological ideals and lived cultural practices are recognised but not fully harnessed for developmental outcomes.

In Nigeria, few studies thoroughly interrogate how the holistic dimensions of *shalom*, emphasising justice, restoration, and community well-being, can be systematically integrated with the relational and reconciliation-oriented praxis of *ofure*. This leaves a critical gap in the development of actionable, culturally resonant frameworks for peace building. There is thus an urgent scholarly and practical need for models that not only compare and contrast these concepts but synthesise their insights to inform effective policy formulation, grassroots engagement, and sustainable development initiatives, ensuring that peace is approached as a spiritual mandate and a lived communal reality.

3.5. *Biblical Shalom and Christian Peacebuilding in Nigeria*

Biblical peace, encapsulated in the Hebrew term *shalom*, extends beyond the mere absence of conflict. It signifies a state of holistic well-being encompassing justice, reconciliation, and harmonious relationships among individuals, communities, and with the divine. Within the Nigerian context, Christian ethics rooted in *shalom* have been pivotal in mediating conflicts and fostering communal harmony. Harmona and Oyetoro (2025) highlight the role of Christian doctrines in peace communication and conflict resolution, emphasizing principles such as forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation as integral to Nigerian peacebuilding efforts. Their study underscores the potential of Christian ethics to bridge cultural divides and promote sustainable peace in a diverse society.

3.6. *Indigenous African Peace Models: A Historical and Cultural Perspective*

Indigenous African peace models are deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual practices of various communities. These models prioritize communal well-being, restorative justice, and the restoration of relationships over punitive measures. Ishola (2022) explores indigenous approaches to peace practices in Africa, emphasizing the importance of truth-telling, communal dialogue, and ritualistic processes in conflict resolution. His research suggests that these traditional mechanisms, though informal, are effective in addressing local conflicts and maintaining social cohesion.

Similarly, Adegoke (2025) examines indigenous peace ontologies and epistemologies among Nigerian communities, including the Yoruba, Ukwu-Nzu, and Ubang cultures. The study highlights how these communities conceptualize peace as a dynamic process involving moral order, spiritual balance, and social harmony. Adegoke argues that indigenous peace practices offer valuable insights into alternative conflict resolution strategies that are culturally resonant and contextually appropriate.

3.7. Integrating Shalom and Indigenous Peace Models: Towards a Hybrid Peace Framework

The integration of biblical *shalom* and indigenous African peace models presents a promising avenue for developing a hybrid peace framework tailored to the Nigerian context. Oluyemi (2025) advocates for a culturally grounded approach to peacebuilding that combines the ethical teachings of Christianity with the communal practices of indigenous African societies. His study suggests that such a hybrid model can address the limitations of state-centric peacebuilding efforts by incorporating local knowledge systems and fostering community ownership of peace processes.

Furthermore, Adegbile (2024) explores the theological connections between African traditional ethics and biblical teachings, proposing that both traditions share common values of justice, reconciliation, and communal harmony. Adegbile's research indicates that integrating these ethical frameworks can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives by aligning them with the moral and cultural values of the communities they aim to serve.

3.8. Case Studies of Shalom and Indigenous Peace Practices in Nigeria

Empirical studies provide concrete examples of how the integration of *shalom* and indigenous peace models has been applied in Nigerian communities. The Jos Forum Inter-Communal Dialogue Process, initiated in 2013, serves as a notable example of a hybrid peace initiative. This process brought together diverse ethnic and religious groups in Plateau State to engage in dialogue and commit to peaceful coexistence. The success of the Jos Forum underscores the potential of combining Christian teachings with indigenous conflict resolution practices in promoting sustainable peace.

Additionally, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) exemplifies the application of indigenous peace principles in advocating for environmental justice and human rights. MOSOP's non-violent resistance to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, reflects the integration of indigenous values of communal well-being and justice in addressing contemporary issues.

3.9 The Application of Ofure and Shalom in Peacebuilding

3.9.1 The Esan Concept of Ofure in Peacebuilding

The Esan people have a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in communal values and traditional governance. Central to their societal structure is the concept of *Ofure*, which translates to "peace" in the Esan language. This term encompasses more than the mere absence of conflict; it signifies a state of harmony, balance, and collective well-being within the community. Traditional leaders, known as *Enijie*, play a pivotal role in maintaining *Ofure* by mediating disputes, upholding customs, and ensuring that justice is administered in accordance with Esan traditions.

One notable example of *ofure* in action is the use of the *azuzu* fan during religious ceremonies. These fans are not only symbols of status but also serve to maintain peace and composure during highly charged rites, festivals, or masquerades. The act of holding the fan is believed to invoke a sense of calm and order, reflecting the community's commitment to peace.

Additionally, grassroots organizations such as the *ofure* Centre for Peace and Development are actively promoting the principles of *ofure* through community engagement

and development initiatives. These efforts aim to address local conflicts, empower individuals, and foster sustainable peace in Esanland.

3.9.2 The Biblical Concept of Shalom and Its Application

In Nigeria, the application of *shalom* has been explored in the context of peacebuilding and community development. For instance, the Jos Forum Inter-communal Dialogue Process, initiated in 2013, brought together diverse ethnic and religious groups in Plateau State to engage in dialogue and commit to peaceful coexistence. This initiative underscores the potential of integrating biblical principles of peace with indigenous practices to address communal conflicts.

Furthermore, organisations like *shalom* are employing the concept of *shalom* in their peacebuilding efforts across Africa. Their approach focuses on transforming the underlying causes of conflict and marginalization through empirical research, grassroots engagement, and interfaith collaboration. By empowering communities to become architects of their own peaceful coexistence, these initiatives demonstrate the practical application of *shalom* in fostering sustainable peace.

3.9.3 Integrating Ofure and Shalom in Peacebuilding

The integration of Esan's *ọfure* and the biblical concept of *Shalom* offers a comprehensive framework for peacebuilding that is both culturally resonant and spiritually grounded. This hybrid approach acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and religious teachings in addressing the multifaceted nature of conflict. By combining the communal focus of Ofure with the holistic vision of *shalom*, communities can develop context-specific strategies that promote justice, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

In conclusion, the application of *ọfure* and *shalom* in peacebuilding efforts within Nigeria highlights the value of integrating indigenous and religious perspectives to create inclusive and effective conflict resolution strategies. Further research and case studies are essential to refine these concepts and assess their impact on fostering lasting peace in diverse communities.

4 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology, drawing on primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through interviews with eighteen *Esan* elders aged 48 to 90 from *Uromi, Irrua, and Iruekpen*, alongside focus group discussions with local youth. Additional first-hand insights were derived from the analysis of *Esan* oral literature, sourced from the *Esan* Cultural Documentation Project (ECDP 2022). For secondary data, the research engaged critically with Old Testament texts, specifically Jeremiah, Isaiah, Psalms, and Micah, as well as recent scholarly commentaries, published sociological field studies and relevant development indices from the National Bureau of Statistics. Thematic content analysis, following Braun & Clarke (2019), was applied to biblical and ethnographic materials to compare core features of *shalom* and *ọfure*. Linguistic and sociological triangulation, including case studies of *Esan* parables and peace meetings, was used to validate thematic correspondences between the concepts.

5 Results

5.1 *Interviews with eighteen Esan elders aged 48 to 90 from Uromi, Irrua, and Iruekpen*

The interviews with eighteen *Esan* elders, ranging from age 48 to 90 and drawn from the towns of *Uromi, Irrua, and Iruekpen*, revealed a nuanced and deeply rooted cultural understanding of *ọfure* as foundational to community life, peace, and development in *Esan* land. Collectively, the responses underscored that *ọfure* is interpreted as a holistic state of being characterised by harmony, relational balance, and communal well-being, rather than just the mere absence of conflict.

When asked to describe *ọfure* in their own words, the elders consistently spoke in terms of "togetherness," "community health," and "settled hearts." Many linked *ọfure* to both tangible and spiritual dimensions, often highlighting that in its truest form, *ọfure* denotes "cosmological harmony," not only free from fighting but manifest in the prosperity of crops, the absence of major calamities and positive interpersonal relations. Several interviewees recounted childhood memories where the elders in their villages would regularly convene to reaffirm *ọfure* through the sharing of kola nuts, prayers to ancestral spirits —that is, their departed fathers, believed to continue watching over their loved ones—, and inclusive gatherings, underpinning *ọfure*.

Exploring dimensions considered essential for maintaining *ọfure,* the elders emphasised relational harmony above all. They pointed out that disputes must be addressed quickly through open dialogue with elders or mediators, ensuring that grievances do not fester with them. Justice was described as "truth-telling and making amends," with a restorative rather than punitive focus. Rituals involving symbolic reconciliation, such as the use of palm wine, visiting homes, or group prayers, were seen as means of healing broken relationships, healing divisions and restoring peace. Additionally, the elders expressed that well-being (in the material and non-material senses) is a collective concern: individual misfortune is often interpreted as a possible consequence of communal disharmony, spotlighting the radically interconnected worldviews in *Esan* tradition.

On the comparative question regarding *shalom*, nearly half of the interviewees, particularly those active in Christian congregations, expressed familiarity with the biblical concept, often defining it as "peace" or "blessing." These respondents drew parallels between *shalom* and *ọfure,* observing that both encapsulate wholeness, justice, and the welfare of all members of the community. Among the distinctions noted, a few elders remarked that *shalom* is more abstract and spiritualised in Christian teaching, whereas *ọfure* embodies ritual practice and day-to-day social acts, reinforcing peace through tangible, communally enacted processes

When recounting the practical application of *ọfure*, elders shared numerous examples where traditional processes had effectively quelled disputes over land, marriage, or leadership succession. One recalled a notable incident in *Irrua* where a protracted family conflict was resolved through a communal process marked by truth-telling, public apologies, and the symbolic "breaking of the kola nut," which restored relationships and that enabled cooperative farming *erogha*, benefiting the entire settlement.

Most interviewees were optimistic about the potential benefits of integrating *shalom* and *ọfure* in addressing contemporary challenges. They suggested that a hybrid approach, drawing from biblical principles and *Esan* traditions, could provide a more sustainable and culturally resonant path out of violence, economic dislocation, and youth unemployment,

which now affect *Esan* land. Elders stressed the importance of teaching youths Christian and indigenous values, as well as practical instruction in conflict mediation and community-building rituals.

For recommendations to leaders and policymakers, participants advocated for the institutionalisation of *ọfure-based* mediation councils in local governance and the integration of *shalom* and *ọfure* principles into school curriculum and wider recognition of traditional structures not only for conflict resolution but also for nurturing a sense of shared responsibility for development. Collectively, the interviews highlighted that any sustainable strategy for peace and development in *Esan* land should harness the wisdom of these intersecting traditions, honouring their distinctiveness and their capacity for creative integration.

5.2 *Focus Group Discussions with local youth.*

The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into local understandings of the realities of peace and well-being among *Esan* community members. Following a warm and clear assurance of confidentiality, participants engaged openly, helping to elucidate individual and collective perceptions of "peace." When asked to define peace in their own words, most respondents described it as a condition of "quietness," "freedom from fear," and "being able to go about one's business without threat or worry." Several participants associated personal and communal well-being not only with material prosperity but also with good relationships, trust, and a sense of belonging, echoing core elements found in the biblical concept of *shalom* and the *Esan* idea of *ọfure*.

Familiarity with the term *ọfure* was universal, and participants connected it to a state of harmony and mutual support, referencing the importance of extended family systems, communal festivals, and age-grade associations in sustaining peace. Most participants admitted to having only a vague or indirect knowledge of *shalom*, often filtered through Christian religious teachings, but found its description similar to their lived ideal of well-being that encompasses more than just survival. In recounting personal experiences, stories of both peace and conflict emerged; elders recalled periods when community disputes were settled amicably by traditional leaders, contrasting with rising instances of youth-related unrest in recent years. Young participants highlighted their active roles in peer mediation but also lamented the loss of respect for elders' authority and traditional mechanisms due to modernisation and economic pressures.

Discussion of values and challenges revealed strong appreciation for traditions such as communal labour, collective celebration appeal to both ancestral and religious authority in mitigating disputes. However, the most widely cited barriers to peace among today's youth were unemployment, substance abuse, mistrust of formal justice systems, and political manipulation, factors echoed in recent empirical studies (Uhunmwuangho & Epelle 2020; Afrobarometer 2022).

Looking toward the future, participants recommended strengthening community-based dialogue, creating youth economic opportunities, and revitalising traditional conflict resolution practices. Notably, many saw potential for greater integration between religious teachings on *shalom* and indigenous practices of *ọfure,* emphasising their synergy as a basis for sustainable peace, provided such integration remains inclusive and adaptable.

5.3 *Case Studies: Two Specific Cases Settled at Iruekpen and Uromi Illustrating the Use of Ọfure*

5.3.1 Land Dispute Resolution in Iruekpen

In the town of Iruekpen, a longstanding land dispute between two families, the Eboh and Ighodalo families, had escalated over several years. The conflict involved claims to a large parcel of land that both families believed rightfully belonged to them. Tensions had risen, and the families had taken their grievances to local government authorities, but their attempts at formal mediation had been unsuccessful. The situation became increasingly volatile, leading to public protests and threats of violence.

In response, community elders in Iruekpen, following the principles of ọfure, intervened to mediate the dispute. The Enijie (traditional rulers) called for a communal gathering, where both families were encouraged to present their grievances publicly, under the watchful eye of the elders. At the gathering, the elders used a series of Esan proverbs that underscored the importance of peace and communal harmony, such as "He who sows peace reaps no quarrels" *(ọnọkọ ọfure, ọi mio ovan).* These words were intended to remind the families of the long-term benefits of reconciliation and the spiritual duty to maintain peace in the community.

The dispute was resolved through a restorative approach, truth-telling, compensation, and the sharing of a symbolic kola nut, a gesture representing mutual forgiveness and the restoration of harmony. The families agreed on a peaceful resolution, with a boundary adjustment to clarify ownership. In the process, the Enijie also prescribed the planting of a "peace tree," a ritual that symbolized the restoration of harmony and the commitment of both families to uphold ọfure in future interactions. This case highlighted how ọfure was used to restore social cohesion by prioritizing dialogue, reconciliation, and a communal sense of responsibility over punitive measures.

5.3.2 Youth Conflict Resolution in Uromi

In *Uromi*, a group of young men from two rival communities, Ekpoma and *Uromi*, had become involved in a violent altercation after a misunderstanding during a local festival. The fight, which initially started as a minor disagreement, quickly escalated into a series of confrontations, resulting in injuries and deepening animosity between the youth groups. The incident not only caused physical harm but also threatened to ignite broader ethnic tensions between the two communities, creating fear and division.

To prevent the situation from spiralling further, the elders in *Uromi*, in consultation with religious leaders, called for a public reconciliation ceremony grounded in the values of *ọfure*. The elders convened a peace council that included representatives from both communities, as well as respected spiritual leaders. The council invoked the proverb, "Children of peace must not carry bitterness in their hearts" *(Ọmọn bi ọfure ei sabọ re dia ki eyan),* to emphasize the necessity of forgiveness and collective healing.

Through a series of restorative practices, the young men involved in the altercation were encouraged to publicly admit their mistakes and seek forgiveness from the community. This was followed by a communal feast, where both sides shared food and drink as a symbolic act of unity and mutual respect. As part of the resolution, the young men participated in a vow of peace ceremony, pledging to honour *ọfure* by actively promoting peaceful coexistence in their

future interactions. This case demonstrated the power of ọfure in restoring not only personal relationships but also broader community cohesion. By focusing on reconciliation rather than punishment, the elders in Uromi used ọfure to mend the social fabric and address the underlying causes of conflict, fostering a sense of unity that transcended the initial animosity. These two examples from Iruekpen and *Uromi* illustrate how *ọfure* is used to resolve conflicts in Esan communities. The process involves a deep commitment to communal harmony, justice, and restorative practices, where reconciliation is prioritized over retribution. By integrating these practices into the community's social structure, ọfure serves as an effective peacebuilding tool, fostering long-term unity and social well-being.

6 Summary of Key Findings

6.1 Holistic Nature of Ọfure

The elders consistently defined *ọfure* not merely as the absence of conflict but as a holistic state marked by communal harmony, relational balance, and both material and spiritual well-being. Ritual practices such as sharing kola nuts, communal prayers, and symbolic reconciliation were highlighted as foundational in sustaining this peace, validating the research objective to identify indigenous mechanisms for holistic societal harmony.

6.2 Relational and Restorative Dynamics

The interviews revealed that *Esan* conflict resolution traditionally prioritises open dialogue, rapid mediation, and restorative justice rooted in truth-telling and making amends instead of punitive measures. This practice supports the objective of identifying culturally embedded conflict management strategies that promote sustainable development.

6.3 Comparative Understanding and Integration

Nearly half of the elders, particularly those active in Christian congregations, demonstrated familiarity with *shalom*, drawing substantive parallels with *ọfure*, especially their shared focus on wholeness, justice, and communal well-being. Elders indicated the need for a hybrid model integrating scriptural and indigenous peace concepts, directly addressing the study's goal of assessing the interface and potential synergy between *shalom* and *ọfure*.

6.4 Youth Perspectives and Socioeconomic Challenges

Focus group discussions with youth revealed strong resonance with the principles of *ọfure*, though appreciation for traditional authority is waning due to modernisation, economic pressures, and rising youth unemployment. The study's methodology effectively captured generational viewpoints, highlighting both appreciation for communal values and the challenges posed by economic and social change.

6.5 *Policy and Community Development Recommendations*

Both elders and youth advocated for formal institutionalisation of *ọfure*-based mediation councils, greater integration of peace concepts in educational curricula, and policy reforms that recognise and empower traditional structures in conflict resolution. These findings affirm the research objective of generating actionable strategies for holistic, sustainable development rooted in intersecting biblical and indigenous frameworks.

6.6 *Restoring Harmony: The centrality of spiritual and social alignment in Shalom and Ọfure for holistic societal development in Esanland*

This study demonstrates that both *shalom* and *ọfure* fundamentally prioritise spiritual and social harmony, viewing genuine peace as rooted in right relationships, with the divine, the community, the land, and oneself. Disrupted spiritual or social bonds undermine collective well-being, making reconciliation, justice, and prosperity inseparable from spiritual and ecological alignment. Especially in Nigeria's context, restoring such harmony is crucial for addressing societal conflict and fragmentation. Thus, sustainable development demands not only economic solutions but also mechanisms for healing spiritual and communal divides, affirming that holistic well-being relies on spiritual coherence and communal solidarity.

6.7 *Contrasting Foundations: Spiritual Covenant and Communal Pragmatism in Shalom and Ọfure.*

A key finding of this study is the marked divergence in the foundational principles of *shalom* and *ọfure*. While *shalom* is inherently emanating from a covenantal relationship initiated by God and anchored in divine justice (Wright 2018), *ọfure* is predominantly pragmatic and communal, expressed through the authority of elders, traditional rites, and communal consensus. This distinction shapes each tradition's approach to peace, with *shalom* emphasising spiritual reconciliation and *ọfure* prioritising practical social harmony.

7 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study resonate deeply with contemporary discussions on indigenous peacebuilding and the significance of contextualised development models. Through qualitative interviews with *Esan* elders and focus group discussions with local youth, the research unveiled the multi-layered nature of *ọfure*, not simply as a cessation of conflict but as the active cultivation of communal harmony, material well-being, and spiritual balance. Traditional practices, such as the sharing of kola nuts and collective ritual prayers, continue to serve as powerful mechanisms for nurturing these bonds. This holistic understanding mirrors the Sustainable Development Goals' emphasis on "peaceful, just, and inclusive societies," as recognised by the United Nations in their latest SDG Progress Report (UNDP 2023).

Interviews further highlighted the deeply relational and restorative character of *Esan* conflict resolution, which favours open dialogue, community-led mediation, and restitution over punitive sanctions. Such practices echo findings in broader African peace studies, where restorative justice and participatory reconciliation processes have been empirically linked to reduced incidence of violence and higher prospects for societal healing (Afrobarometer 2022).

The elders' emphasis on communal restoration, rather than retribution, directly supports sustainable development, as it maintains social solidarity and trust, two factors consistently associated with collective resilience (UNDP 2022).

A striking aspect of the research is the emerging interface between *shalom* and *ọfure*, particularly among Christianized elders. Approximately half of the elder participants actively identified parallels in the two traditions, noting congruence in their focus on justice, right relationships, and wholeness. This is consistent with the observation that a biblical model of *shalom* offers fertile ground for integration with indigenous frameworks, potentially enabling hybrid approaches that are both spiritually resonant and culturally legitimate.

In synthesis, the study concretely affirms that both *shalom* and *ọfure* offer holistic pathways to sustainable societal well-being, with restoration of right relationships seen as essential for communal flourishing. Nevertheless, a significant divergence also exists: *shalom* is fundamentally theologically anchored in divine covenant and justice, while *ọfure* is pragmatically rooted in communal consensus and tradition. Reconciling these perspectives in development policy will require nuanced, culturally informed strategies that respect both spiritual and social dimensions of peace.

8 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 *Summary*

This paper offers an in-depth exploration of the interface between the Old Testament concept of *shalom* and the *Esan* socio-cultural construct of *ọfure*, analysing their combined implications for holistic societal development in multi-ethnic contexts such as Nigeria. Both *shalom* and *ọfure* are shown to transcend the simple absence of conflict: they encompass comprehensive well-being, justice, relational harmony, and the flourishing of both individuals and communities. Through theological, socio-cultural, and developmental lenses, the paper articulates how these paradigms, despite their distinct historical and cultural roots, converge on essential aspects of peace and sustainable progress.

The statement of the problem reveals how contemporary development approaches in Nigeria remain predominantly centred on GDP growth and other economic measurements, too often sidelining relational, spiritual, and cultural dimensions fundamental to society's health. The marginalisation of non-material factors and indigenous knowledge systems illustrated in the underutilization of both *shalom* and *ọfure* has contributed to persistent communal unrest, erosion of social trust, and developmental deficits, especially in places like Edo State (Uhunmwuangho & Epelle 2020).

Furthermore, it offers actionable recommendations for scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and faith actors seeking to foster enduring peace and prosperity. In sum, this study affirms that the integration of *shalom* and *ọfure* provides a robust, holistic foundation for addressing Nigeria's contemporary challenges, thereby offering a transformative template for societal development rooted in justice, reconciliation, and communal well-being. In sum, the interface of *shalom* and *ọfure* could provide a robust lens for societal advancement, emphasising participatory, indigenous, and spiritually grounded practices that go far beyond conventional Western indices.

8.2 *Conclusion*

This study illuminates the profound potential residing at the intersection of Old Testament *shalom* and the *Esan* construct of *ọfure* for envisioning and advancing holistic societal development in Nigeria. The qualitative findings, drawn from rich engagements with *Esan* elders and youth, make clear that *ọfure* is markedly expansive in meaning, embodying an ethos of relational harmony, spiritual coherence, and practical justice that mirrors the biblical ideal of *shalom*. Both frameworks recognise peace not as mere absence of strife, but as a positive, active condition comprising right relationships, with the divine, the self, the community, and the environment, thus offering more sustainable and inclusive pathways toward well-being than approaches rooted in material indices alone.

The comparative nature of this work reveals a significant yet complementary distinction, while *shalom* is theologically grounded in a covenantal relationship with God that, for reconciliation and transformative justice, *ọfure* is realised through pragmatic communal processes, elder-led mediation, and culturally resonant rituals. This divergence, rather than hindering synthesis, suggests fertile ground for a hybrid model that embraces both spiritual depth and social pragmatism. The participants' perspectives underscore an urgent need for such integrated approaches, as rapid modernization, economic insecurity, and declining traditional authority are increasingly eroding the mechanisms by which communal peace and justice have historically been maintained.

Policy and community recommendations emerging from the study call for the revitalization and institutionalization of *Ọfure* based mediation practices, curricular reforms that foreground indigenous and biblical peace concepts, and policy frameworks that empower traditional authority structures in collaboration with faith-based organizations. These proposals align with the broader developmental imperative, enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 16, of fostering inclusive, peaceful, and just societies. Ultimately, this asserts that holistic development in Nigeria must transcend narrow economic metrics and deliberately cultivate the spiritual, relational, and cultural scaffolding provided by both *shalom* and *ọfure*. Only by revitalizing these complementary traditions can communities address not just the symptoms but also the deep-seated causes of conflict, alienation, and societal fragmentation. The study's findings thus serve as a clarion call for scholars, policymakers, religious leaders, and community actors to embrace and operationalize these indigenous and theological resources in forging a pathway to sustainable peace and holistic flourishing.

8.3. *Recommendations*

Based on these findings, several recommendations are hereby proposed to help bridge the gap between indigenous and scriptural peace concepts, foster holistic societal development, and promote sustainable peace in *Esan* communities and similar contexts:

8.3.1 *Institutionalise Hybrid Peace Councils*

Establish and formally recognize local mediation councils composed of both traditional elders and faith leaders, with mandates to integrate principles from both *shalom* and *ọfure*. This structure can ensure that conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes are inclusive, drawing on spiritual, restorative, and communal mechanisms that resonate across generational and religious divides.

8.3.2 *Integrate Peace Concepts into Educational Curricula*

Revise and expand curricula at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to explicitly teach the values and practices of both *shalom* and *ọfure*. By incorporating these indigenous and scriptural peace paradigms, young people can internalize principles of holistic well-being, justice, restorative dialogue, and shared responsibility, preparing them to navigate and resolve societal challenges constructively.

8.3.3 *Empower Traditional and Religious Structures in Policymaking*

Encourage government and policy actors to formally recognize and empower traditional authorities and faith-based institutions in local governance and development initiatives. Policy reforms should legitimize indigenous mediation methods, involve community elders in decision-making, and support the coexistence of customary and statutory legal systems to ensure culturally grounded and participatory development.

8.3.4 *Promote Youth Engagement and Economic Inclusion*

Develop youth-focused programs that not only address economic needs, such as job creation and vocational training, but also reconnect young people to communal values and conflict resolution traditions. Engaging youth as co-creators of peace initiatives can help restore their trust in traditional structures, adapting ancient wisdom to contemporary challenges and reducing restiveness linked to social and economic disenfranchisement.

8.3.5 *Advanced Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*

Foster ongoing platforms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in *Esan* communities and beyond. By facilitating regular forums and social resources, laying a durable foundation for restorative and inclusive societal growth.

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Appendix I
Interview Guide for *Esan* Elders (*Uromi*, Irrua, and Iruekpen):

1. Understanding *Ofure*:
Can you describe in your own words what *ofure* means to you and how it has been practised in your community throughout your lifetime?

2. Dimensions of Peace:
In your experience, what aspects (such as relationships, justice rituals, well-being) are most important for establishing and maintaining *ofure* in *Esan* communities?

3. Comparative Perspectives:
Are you familiar with the concept of *shalom* from the Bible or Christian teachings? How would you compare or contrast it with the *Esan* idea of *ofure*?

4. Practical Application:
Can you share an example from your community where *ofure* practices or principles helped to resolve conflict, restore peace, and promote development?

5. Integration for Development:
Do you believe that combining the values of *shalom* and *ofure* could help address current social or developmental challenges in *Esan*land or other multi-ethnic communities? Please explain your views.

6. Recommendations for the Future:
What advice or recommendations would you give to community leaders, educators, or policymakers who wish to promote peace and holistic development based on *Esan* and/or biblical principles?

Appendix II
Focus Group Discussion Guide
Introduction
Begin by welcoming the participants and expressing appreciation for their willingness to take part in the discussion. Clearly state the overall purpose of the session, emphasising your interest in exploring perspectives on peace and well-being, as well as the importance of their contributions to this research. Reassure participants of the confidentiality of their responses and explain that any recordings or notes will be used solely for academic purposes, with all identities kept anonymous. Obtain informed consent for participation and permission to record the session. Establish a respectful and open atmosphere by briefly outlining the ground rules: everyone's opinions are valued; there are no right or wrong answers; and respectful, open-minded engagement is expected throughout.

Discussion Topics and Sample Questions.

a. Understanding Peace and Well-being
Invite participants to share their understanding by asking, "How would you describe 'peace' in your own words?" Probe further with questions such as, "What does a peaceful life or community look like to you?" and "Are you familiar with the terms *shalom* or *ofure,* and what do they mean to you?"

b. Personal Experience
Encourage participants to reflect on their lived experiences: "Can you share an example of a time your community experienced peace or conflict?" Ask, "What roles do young people play in promoting peace or resolving conflict in your community?"

c. Values and Challenges
Explore community strengths and barriers by asking, "What values or traditions help to maintain harmony here?" and "What do you see as the major challenges to peace among youths today?"

d. Future Aspirations
Conclude this section by prompting participants to consider solutions: "What changes would you like to see that could better promote peace and well-being for young people?" and "How might traditional and religious concepts, such as *shalom** and *ofure,* be applied to help address current challenges?"

Conclusion
Summarise the key points raised during the discussion, highlighting insights and main themes. Invite any final thoughts or suggestions. Express gratitude once again for their time and perspectives. Explain the next steps of the research and reassure participants about how their input will be used, primarily to inform understanding and propose strategies for peace and well-being in their community.

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