

TURNING ALERTS INTO AGREEMENTS

Municipal Mediation in Nigeria's Middle Belt

Abstract

This study examines how Local Government Areas (LGAs) mediate everyday conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Using an embedded comparative design and process tracing of cases in Plateau (Mangu, Riyom, Barkin Ladi), with borderland vignettes from Adamawa and Taraba, we show municipal settlements endure when three capacities move together: inclusion (voice and translation), legibility (maps, dated milestones, public read-outs), and follow-through (calendared monitoring with civilian security calibration). Rapid alert-to-talks handoffs and map-first drafting reduce rumor and recurrence; charismatic convening alone does not. We specify a portable "municipal kit" and propose practical performance metrics for institutionalization.

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Introduction: Turning Early Warnings into Enforceable Peace

Local peace is rarely engineered from distant capitals; it is made in municipal rooms where everyday disputes are translated into procedures, texts, and follow-up routines. In Nigeria's Middle Belt, Local Government Areas (LGAs) sit at this meso-level junction, brokering between state institutions and community authorities across land/tenure, farmer–herder, and multilingual/interfaith conflicts. Scholarship on the “local turn” and on polycentric governance anticipates such roles but often leaves the municipal mechanics underspecified, how convening power, translation, mapping, and public registration actually lower violence and sustain compliance (Autesserre 2021; Mac Ginty 2021; Ostrom 2010). This study addresses that gap by examining Plateau State's articulated peace infrastructure, anchored by the Plateau Peace Building Agency and the Operation Rainbow early warning system, and by tracing how LGAs convert alerts and petitions into fair procedures, legible agreements, and disciplined follow-through (Kew 2021; UN Women Nigeria 2021; Mercy Corps 2022). We argue that these three hinges, inclusion, legibility, and follow-through, explain why some municipal settlements endure while others unravel.

Empirically, we treat Plateau as a core case because its nested architecture allows the full mediation cycle to be observed, from alert-to-talks latency through agreement design to 30/90/180-day reviews, while using Adamawa (Numan–Demsu) and Taraba (Sardauna–Mambilla) as borderland vignettes that stress-test portability under multilingual and cross-border conditions. Methodologically, an

embedded comparative design with process tracing enables us to link municipal actions to outcomes and to distinguish them from security shocks or NGO-led convenings. Substantively, the contribution is twofold: we specify the municipal micro-infrastructure that makes “local ownership” actionable (translator rosters, seating plans, map-first drafting, public read-outs), and we identify scope conditions under which those mechanics must be reweighted to travel, voice engineering in highly multilingual settings and evidence-first drafting for corridor disputes (Cleen Foundation 2023; Amnesty International 2018). The result is a practical, portable account of how municipalities can anchor peace architectures that are both legitimate and enforceable.

Municipal Peace Infrastructures at the Meso-Level

Recent peacebuilding scholarship argues that durable settlements emerge when meso-level actors, local governments, traditional/religious authorities, and civic groups, jointly translate community signals into procedural, resourced mediation (Autesserre 2021; Mac Ginty 2014; Ware and 2022). In polycentric systems, municipalities have unique convening authority, fiscal levers and proximity to everyday disputes, allowing them to stitch together “everyday peace” practices (Mac Ginty 2021) with formal institutions (Ostrom 2010). In Nigeria's Middle Belt, this meso-level sits with Local Government Areas (LGAs), which interface upward with state security/peace agencies and downward with ward heads, ardos (Fulani leaders), market unions, women and youth groups. The resulting “municipal peace infrastructure” is not merely symbolic: it sets

ground rules, allocates logistics, records agreements, and monitors compliance, functions repeatedly identified as missing in purely ad hoc or elite-led processes (Autesserre 2021; Mac Ginty 2021).

Across Plateau, Adamawa, and Taraba, LGAs regularly mediate land/tenure and boundary disputes, farmer–herder/transhumance clashes, multilingual/ethnic and interfaith frictions, market/trade conflicts, and tensions around returnee resettlement. Empirical work links the frequency and lethality of farmer–herder clashes to climate variability and southward herd mobility, weak dispute institutions, and identity politics (Efobi et al. 2025; Nwankwo 2025; Adigun 2022). In Plateau specifically, violence spikes since late-2023, in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi, underline why municipal convening and follow-up capacity matters (Asadu 2023). These episodes typically combine resource triggers (crop damage, blocked corridors), rumor/disinformation, and rapid mobilization of vigilantes, requiring LGAs to set multilingual ground rules, de-escalate, and document agreements legible to heterogeneous communities (Higazi 2016; Krause 2017).

Plateau State has codified elements that many Nigerian states lack. The Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) convenes a monthly Community/Plateau Peace Architecture Forum (C/CPAF) where LGA officials, traditional/religious leaders, security agencies, journalists, and CSOs share early warning and coordinate responses; it also issues communiqués and supports local dialogues (PPBA 2018–2025). Complementing this is Operation Rainbow, an Early Warning/Early Response (EWER) mechanism that channels

alerts from community observers via digital and offline pipelines to LGAs and security actors (Cleen Foundation 2023). In practice, LGAs in Mangu, Riyom, and Barkin Ladi often co-chair dialogues with PPBA, recruit translators, underwrite logistics, and register memoranda of understanding (MoUs) whose annexes (maps, seasonal calendars) become reference points for enforcement (PPBA/OGP commitments 2021–23). This nested architecture makes Plateau a strategic “core case” for analyzing municipal mediation.

Comparative reference to Kaduna State is analytically useful: the Kaduna State Peace Commission Law (2017) formalized LGA Peace Committees and clarified their mandates, composition, and lines of accountability, offering a benchmark for what institutionalization looks like (Iwuchukwu 2020; UN Women Nigeria 2021). While Plateau relies on PPBA/Operation Rainbow and a network of forums rather than a single state peace law, Kaduna’s codification demonstrates how municipal mediation can be routinized (clear Terms of References (TORs), gender quotas, reporting lines). The contrast helps specify which Plateau practices are policy-dependent (e.g., EWER hand-offs) versus personality-dependent (e.g., chairs’ convening energy).

Structured, locally led mediation can reduce violent events and improve dispute resolution, but only when the minimum kit (training, logistics, translation, templates, follow-up) is present. A multi-state randomized evaluation found community mediation programming (training local authorities, convening dialogues, media) reduced violence and improved intergroup outcomes (Mercy Corps

2022). In Adamawa (Demsu, Numan, Lamurde, Girei, Mayo Belwa), program data from 2021–2022 report 120 disputes resolved with a 29% reduction in violent conflict coinciding with training of 124 local authorities on interest-based negotiation and resource planning (Mercy Corps 2022). These findings align with global research on the value of “everyday” dispute resolution infrastructures embedded in legitimate local fora (Autesserre 2021; Mac Ginty 2021).

LGAs abutting Cameroon face seasonal cross-border transhumance, multi-lingual constituencies, and intertwined religious/ethnic identities. In Adamawa (Numan–Demsu axis), violence escalated sharply in late-2017 with tit-for-tat farmer–herder attacks; subsequent interfaith platforms (e.g., Adamawa Peace Initiative, API) and LGA-anchored dialogues have been credited with stabilizing hotspots by pairing civic legitimacy with municipal convening (Courtright 2023; Jacob et al. 2016). In Taraba (Sardauna/Mambilla Plateau), disputes weave together land/tenure, identity, and cross-border mobility; rights reporting (2018) documents mass casualty events and displacement, underscoring the need for documented MoUs, bilingual minutes, and route mapping that municipalities can steward (Amnesty International 2018). These borderland cases highlight translation, mapping, and cross-jurisdictional liaison as core municipal tasks in mediation design.

Plateau combines (i) salient, recent crises, notably the December 2023 and January 2024 attacks centered on Mangu/Bokkos/Barkin Ladi, with (ii) observable institutions (PPBA, Operation Rainbow, C/CPAF, OPSH liaison) that allow researchers to track the full

mediation chain: trigger → convening → multilingual facilitation → agreement design → compliance monitoring. This makes it possible to test hypotheses about institutionalization (budgeted committees, templates), inclusion (women/youth/interfaith facilitators), and EWER alignment (alert-to-action speed) as predictors of reduced recurrence (United States Institute of Peace 2025). The Adamawa and Taraba vignettes then stress-test the transferability of these mechanisms under borderland pressures.

Design Features of Municipal Mediation: Institutions, Tools, and Constraints

In the Middle Belt, mediation “lives” in hybrid spaces that tie municipal authority to state-level peace infrastructure and civic legitimacy. Plateau State’s PPBA formalizes those ties through standing fora (e.g., the Community/Plateau Peace Architecture Forum), documented timelines of incidents and responses, and operational partnerships with Operation Rainbow (an Early Warning/Early Response, EWER, system) (Kew 2021). Kaduna offers a legal benchmark: the Kaduna State Peace Commission Law (2017) explicitly provides for state- and LGA-level peace bodies with defined mandates, membership, and reporting lines (UN Women Nigeria 2021). Together, these models clarify where LGAs anchor mediation: either by statute (Kaduna) or via a nested agency-forum architecture (Plateau).

Across Plateau LGAs (e.g. Mangu, Riyom, Barkin Ladi), disputes typically surface via police reports, petitions from ward or district heads, or EWER alerts relayed to municipal

desks. Operation Rainbow's model, community observers; multi-channel alerting (WhatsApp, Telegram, SMS); referral to "appropriate agencies" for action, shortens the time between incident signal and municipal convening (Cleen Foundation 2023). The practical implication for LGAs is procedural: timeboxing the first joint session, identifying translators early, and agreeing to a draft agenda before parties meet (Kew 2021).

Comparative evidence shows some LGA functions recur across conflict types, land/tenure, farmer–herder, multilingual/ethnic, market/trade, and returnee resettlement. LGAs issue invitations, provide neutral venues, seat mixed delegations (women/youth/Ardos/district heads/market unions), and arrange simultaneous interpretation to Hausa, Berom/Mwaghavul, Fulfulde, etc. Inclusion and language access are repeatedly associated with higher perceived fairness and compliance (UN Women Nigeria 2021; Mac Ginty 2021). Survey teams map out boundary lines or seasonal corridors, market departments reference levy by-laws, and Area Courts or administrative secretariats retrieve previous rulings or memoranda of understanding (MoUs). Where mapping is used (e.g., sketch maps of dry-season corridors and water points), agreements show clearer obligations and fewer ambiguities (UN Women Nigeria 2021). LGAs standardize MoU templates with milestones (e.g., harvest windows; movement schedules; compensation tables), assign joint monitoring teams, and file agreements in an LGA register; public communiqués (church/mosque announcements, community radio) reduce rumor and increase visibility of sanctions (Kew 2021; Mercy Corps 2022). Liaison with Police, NSCDC, or Operation

Safe Haven (Plateau) allows protection around markets, routes, or returnee sites while keeping uniformed presence outside the negotiating room (Kew 2021; Amnesty International 2018). Lastly, implementing 30-, 90-, and 180-day follow-up sessions, providing hotline numbers, posting signage along key corridors, and rapidly reconvening in response to reported breaches are recommended best practices (Mercy Corps 2022).

A multi-site randomized evaluation in North-Central Nigeria found that training local leaders in mediation and negotiation, paired with structured community dialogues, reduced violence and improved social cohesion; notably, the mediation training component drove the largest effect size on security outcomes (Mercy Corps 2022). A follow-on synthesis highlights that where programs complemented municipal convening with templates, translator rosters, and monitoring routines, effects were stronger and more durable (Mercy Corps 2024). Conversely, the absence of accountability (investigation/prosecution) and weak documentation have been linked with renewed cycles of violence (Amnesty International 2018). Design lessons for LGAs therefore include: budget for logistics and translation; adopt SOPs from trigger → talks → compliance; and publish non-sensitive metrics (alerts acted on, MoUs registered, milestones met).

In Adamawa's Numan–Demsu axis, farmer–herder disputes since 2017 exposed how multilingual and interfaith dynamics interact with land claims and riverine farming. Interfaith civic platforms such as the Adamawa Peace Initiative (API) have worked

alongside LGAs to co-convene dialogues, pair peace messaging with livelihoods for youth, and keep channels open aftershocks (Ensign 2016; Courtright 2023). In Taraba's Sardauna/Mambilla Plateau, cross-border transhumance and layered identity politics complicate land/route mediation; rights reporting documented severe violence and displacement in 2017–18, underscoring the need for bilingual minutes, corridor maps, and liaison with cross-jurisdictional actors that municipalities are well-placed to coordinate (Amnesty International 2018). The comparative point is not that LGAs can cure borderland insecurity alone, but that documented, multilingual, and monitored municipal agreements reduce the room for rumor, unilateral enforcement, and spoiler narratives.

Assessments in Plateau and Kaduna show that where women and youth have reserved seats, translation support, and modest stipends/childcare, they speak earlier, propose practical sequencing (e.g., market reopening steps), and are more likely to serve on monitoring teams, correlating with higher satisfaction and lower recurrence (UN Women Nigeria 2021). Many Plateau, Adamawa, or Taraba disputes also hinge on access that affects women disproportionately (water points, market safety, school routes), making their participation not only normative but instrumental for enforceable agreements (UN Women 2021; Mac Ginty 2021). The implication is administrative, not rhetorical: LGAs should write inclusion into TORs, allocate small budgets, and capture sex-disaggregated participation and satisfaction data.

From Polycentric Peace to Municipal Mechanics: A Process-Tracing Lens on LGA Mediation

This research design frames municipal peace work in Plateau, with comparative glances to Adamawa and Taraba, as the operation of a municipal peace infrastructure nested within a polycentric governance field in which authority and problem-solving capacities are dispersed across state agencies, LGAs, traditional and religious authorities, civic groups, and security actors (Ostrom 2010; Mac Ginty 2021; Autesserre 2021). The municipal tier is analytically distinct because it combines formal levers, convening power, bylaws, budgets, documentation, with proximity to “everyday peace” practices that confer local legitimacy (Mac Ginty 2021). These interfaces produce a recognizably hybrid governance arena in which statutory and customary norms co-produce order (Boege et al. 2009; Meagher 2012). In that arena, LGAs are not peripheral observers but meso-level brokers that translate signals from early-warning systems and petitions into procedures, rules, agendas, and translation, and artifacts, maps, minutes, and MoUs, that reduce uncertainty and transaction costs in multiparty disputes (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015).

The framework specifies linked mechanisms through which municipal action plausibly affects outcomes. First, triggering and triage convert EWER alerts, police reports, or community petitions into an administratively owned case with defined roles and timelines; shortening the interval between signal and first contact limits rumor cascades and retaliatory mobilization (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; de Coning 2018). Second,

convening and inclusion use the LGA's summons authority to assemble balanced delegations and guarantee language access; perceived fairness increases when procedures are visible, understandable, and inclusive for women, youth, minority groups, and cross-border stakeholders (Tyler 2006; UN Women Nigeria 2021). Third, rule-setting and process design establish ground rules, caucus options, time-boxing, and evidence protocols that structure interaction under stress and make de-escalation possible without loss of face (Ansell and Gash 2008). Fourth, evidence work, from sketch maps of boundaries and seasonal corridors to retrieval of relevant bylaws and Area-Court decisions, thickens the factual basis of negotiation in land and route cases where ambiguity is otherwise weaponized (UN Women Nigeria 2021; Higazi 2016). Fifth, agreement design converts talk into credible commitments by specifying roles, milestones, compensation tables, signage and calendars, and grievance-redress steps that make compliance observable (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Finally, monitoring and enforcement deploy joint monitoring teams, escalation ladders, and periodic reviews that sustain cooperation in the face of shocks and spoilers (Scharpf 2018; Paffenholz 2015). As a whole, these mechanisms align with the adaptive peacebuilding perspective, which stresses iterative, feedback-driven adjustment rather than fixed blueprints (de Coning 2018).

From these mechanisms flow testable expectations. Where institutionalization is stronger, standing peace committees, codified standard operating procedures, and budget lines, the rate of agreement implementation should be higher and the likelihood of recurrence lower at 6–12 months than in ad-

hoc arrangements (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Where inclusive, multilingual procedures are guaranteed, reserved seats, translation rosters, and data on participation, perceived fairness and voluntary compliance should be higher (Tyler 2006; Paffenholz et al. 2016; UN Women Nigeria 2021). Where EWER alignment is tighter, measured as shorter alert-to-talks latency, retaliation windows and incident severity should shrink (de Coning 2018; Mac Ginty 2021). Where documentation and mapping are embedded, map annexes, seasonal calendars, public communiqués, subsequent boundary and access disputes should decline (UN Women Nigeria 2021; Higazi 2016). Finally, where security calibration protects talks and sensitive sites without crowding civilian facilitation, spoiler risks should fall while dialogue legitimacy is preserved (Scharpf 2018; Krause 2017).

To make these expectations falsifiable, the analysis defines outcomes and indicators with precision. Recurrence is the reappearance of violent incidents tied to the same issue dyad within 3, 6, and 12 months of an agreement, triangulated across EWER logs, police and corps situation reports, and community reporting (Beach 2024). Implementation is captured as task-level milestones, installation of signage, reopening of corridors or markets by agreed dates, payment of compensation, scored on binary or ordinal scales using documentary evidence and site checks. Access restoration records the operational status of affected infrastructure, market days, school routes, grazing corridors, water points, categorized as open, partially open, or closed. Perceived fairness and satisfaction are drawn from short post-dialogue surveys and systematically coded focus-group sentiments,

enabling congruence tests with behavioral outcomes (Tyler 2006). An operational metric for alert-to-action latency, the time from initial EWER/petition to the first joint session, serves as a proxy for institutional readiness and coordination quality.

Causally, the study employs process tracing within an embedded comparative design. Two Plateau mediations, selected for variation in conflict type (land/route; farmer–herder), serve as the core process-tracing cases, while shorter vignettes from Adamawa and Taraba probe portability under borderland conditions. Within each case, the analysis tests whether posited mechanisms were present and necessary or sufficient at key junctures using classic hoop, smoking-gun, and straw-in-the-wind tests (George and Bennett 2005). For instance, evaluating the EWER hypothesis requires process evidence that an alert reached the LGA, triggered a convening letter within a pre-specified window, and was followed by de-escalation rather than tit-for-tat mobilization. Bayesian updating across heterogeneous traces, minute books, correspondence, SMS and letter trails, interview convergence, and field observations, enables disciplined inference about mechanism activation (Bennett and Checkel 2015).

The framework also delineates scope conditions and rival explanations. Political cycles can stall committees and budgets; elite capture can determine who gets a seat and thus the perceived legitimacy of outcomes; security shocks may swamp procedural gains; and cross-border seasonality can outdate otherwise well-designed MoUs. Rivals include selection effects (LGAs preferentially engage tractable disputes), CSO primacy (where

external conveners, not municipalities, drive results), and security deterrence (violence falls due to troop surges rather than mediation). Mitigation comes from pattern matching and congruence tests across cases, targeted negative-case lookups where LG mediation failed or was absent, and timing tests that examine whether observed changes follow municipal actions rather than exogenous shocks (George and Bennett 2005).

Tracing Municipal Mediation in Practice: An Embedded, Process-Tracing Design for Plateau with Borderland Vignettes

This research uses an embedded comparative case design centred on Plateau State and complemented by shorter shadow vignettes from Adamawa and Taraba to test the portability of proposed mechanisms under borderland conditions. The Plateau core focuses on Mangu, Riyom, and Barkin Ladi, sites with recent salience and observable municipal peace infrastructures, while the Adamawa (Numan–Demsā) and Taraba (Sardauna/Mambilla Plateau) vignettes probe multilingual constituencies, cross-border transhumance, and jurisdictional complexity. Case study designs are appropriate where the goal is to unpack causal processes in context rather than estimate average treatment effects; within-case analysis relies on process tracing to connect municipal “mechanics” to outcomes with temporally ordered, diagnostic evidence (Maxwell 2013; Beach and Pedersen 2018; Bennett and Checkel 2015).

Site selection follows a “most-informative cases” logic: Plateau offers a nested peace architecture that makes the full mediation chain observable (trigger → convening →

multilingual facilitation → agreement design → compliance monitoring), while Adamawa and Taraba introduce harder scope conditions to test mechanism robustness. This purposeful heterogeneity supports analytic generalization by examining whether similar municipal mechanics operate across distinct conflict ecologies and institutional scaffolding (Yin 2018; Maxwell 2013). Data collection integrates three streams, documents, interviews/focus groups, and direct observation, sequenced to reinforce inferential leverage. The documentary corpus includes PPBA communiqués and incident timelines, Operation Rainbow EWER procedures and alert logs where accessible, LGA budget books and council minutes, mediation MoUs and annexes (maps, seasonal calendars), police and NSCDC situation reports, and CSO/INGO evaluation materials. Documentary analysis both reconstructs event histories for the trigger-to-talks pipeline and pinpoints decision nodes at which municipal actions could plausibly alter trajectories (Miles et al. 2014).

We conduct 70 key informant interviews (KIIs) spanning municipal officials, state/para-state actors, traditional and religious authorities, security representatives, and civic groups, alongside 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) with farmers, herders, traders, women, youth, and mixed interfaith participants. Sampling is purposive for institutional roles and maximum-variation for community perspectives, with snowballing for hard-to-reach actors; this strategy leverages “information power” and supports meaning saturation in heterogeneous conflict settings (Guest et al. 2006; Hennink et al. 2017). Interview guides trace the chain from alert receipt and convening letters through ground

rules, translation arrangements, evidence preparation, agreement drafting, and compliance routines; parallel guides for traditional/religious and security actors probe legitimacy, sequencing, spoiler management, and protective presence calibration; FGD prompts elicit perceived fairness, language access, clarity of obligations, and experience with implementation and breach. Because language access and semantic precision shape both conflict dynamics and perceived fairness, we employ trained interpreters and a back-translation protocol for consent scripts and key quotations to minimize meaning loss in cross-language research (Squires 2009; van Nes et al. 2010).

Data management and analysis combine secure storage with iterative coding. Audio, transcripts, and fieldnotes are encrypted with role-based access. Coding proceeds in two cycles: a hybrid codebook derived deductively from mechanism domains (trigger/triage; convening/inclusion; rule-setting; evidence work; agreement design; monitoring/enforcement) and inductively from emergent themes, followed by pattern coding to build mechanism process maps and cross-case matrices. Intercoder consistency is established on at least 10–15% of transcripts with negotiated agreement; we report percent agreement and Cohen’s kappa as appropriate, documenting reconciliation decisions (Miles et al. 2014; O’Connor and Joffe 2020). Process tracing adjudicates causal claims through within-case tests with distinct probative value. Hoop tests assess necessary conditions (e.g., if no convening occurred within a set window after an EWER alert, rapid-response mechanisms likely failed); smoking-gun tests seek specific traces, dated convening letters, SMS threads, draft minutes, that plausibly

account for compressed de-escalation windows; straw-in-the-wind tests provide gentle support or doubt. Bayesian updating adjusts confidence as heterogeneous traces accumulate across minutes, correspondence, screenshots, convergent testimonies, and observations (George and Bennett 2005; Bennett and Checkel 2015).

Rival explanations are explicitly modeled: selection effects in which LGAs pick tractable disputes; CSO primacy in which external conveners, not municipalities, drive outcomes; and security deterrence, where troop surges or curfews, not mediation, account for reduced violence. Congruence and timing tests compare sequences of municipal actions with exogenous shocks to judge the better-fitting narrative, supporting analytic rather than statistical generalization (Yin 2018). Validity and trustworthiness are enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and reflexive practice. Triangulation across documents, interviews/FGDs, and observation increases construct validity in contentious settings; member checking with a subset of participants (municipal committee representatives and community delegates) verifies descriptive accuracy and the plausibility of mechanism narratives without treating feedback as dispositive; reflexive memos track positionality, access dynamics, and potential confirmation bias throughout fieldwork. Ethical protocols follow do-no-harm principles adapted for conflict research: contextual risk assessment, anonymization and secure storage, neutral venues and careful scheduling, voluntary informed consent, and referral pathways for distress or protection issues (De Souza et al. 2016; Berger 2015).

Finally, the design aims for claims that are both specific and portable: dense observation in Plateau allows us to trace municipal mechanics inside an articulated peace architecture, while the Adamawa and Taraba vignettes examine whether multilingual inclusion, documentation and mapping, EWER-to-talks handoffs, and calibrated protective presence perform similarly under borderland pressures. This pairing of mechanism-focused process tracing with transparent indicators and validity safeguards yields context-grounded insights into how LGAs mediate land, identity, and resource conflicts and which municipal features most plausibly reduce recurrence. (Beach and Pedersen 2018; Yin 2018).

Municipal Architecture and the Mediation Cycle in Plateau State

Across Mangu, Riyom, and Barkin Ladi, the same core architecture underpins local mediation: an LGA-centered arrangement that is tightly meshed with Plateau's state-level peace infrastructure. The Plateau Peace Building Agency convenes standing forums where municipal officers sit alongside traditional and religious leaders, security agencies, and civil society, while Operation Rainbow's early warning channels push incidents to the desks that can act on them. What matters empirically is not just that these bodies exist, but how their routines plug into each other: PPBA for routine coordination and legitimacy brokering, Operation Rainbow for signal intake and escalation, and LGAs for convening power, logistics, and record-keeping. The relationships are not hierarchical; they are interdependent, with each node providing a distinct capability the others lack.

In practice, LGAs operate as the hinge between formal authority and community legitimacy. Upward, they translate alerts and petitions into actionable sessions by aligning calendars with PPBA and notifying security actors when protective presence is necessary outside the negotiation room. Downward, they assemble delegations that combine district and village heads, *ardos*, market unions, women's groups, and youth representatives. This bidirectional role allows them to maintain legitimacy on both sides: credible to state agencies because they can convene, document, and follow through; credible to communities because they can ensure language access, balance speaking order, and locate the talks in neutral municipal venues. The interaction effect is visible when convening power and inclusion are exercised together: the more multilingual and socially balanced the room, the easier it becomes for other actors to endorse and enforce the outcomes produced there.

Resources determine how far that convening power travels. Where LGAs budget for logistics, translation, and documentation, sessions start on time, people who would otherwise be excluded can attend, and agreements can be written with the specificity that enables monitoring. The presence of standard templates, especially those with map annexes, seasonal calendars, and compensation tables, turns an agreement from aspiration into an enforceable instrument. Conversely, under-resourced convenings drift into impressionistic understandings that are fragile in the face of rumor or a single bad-faith breach. In short, procedures and resources are complements: neither works well without the other, and both are required to translate an alert into a durable settlement.

The mediation cycle itself has a consistent spine with local variation in speed and fidelity. It begins with a trigger, an Operation Rainbow alert, a police entry, or a formal petition, that prompts an LGA screening and an initial call with PPBA to align on scope and participants. Pre-talks follow, usually as shuttle diplomacy to de-escalate temperature and verify who must be present for any agreement to stick. The first joint session is where the municipal advantage becomes most visible: ground rules are set, interpretation arrangements are made explicit, and the LGA chair or designate signals that the municipality will underwrite logistics and keep the record. When parties caucus, municipal staff keep the timetable moving and prepare a draft structure so that the drafting phase does not restart the debate. The signature is often accompanied by a registration step, an internal file number and a physical or digital repository, plus a public communication that makes the terms legible to non-participants. Follow-up then runs on a light but regular cadence (thirty, ninety, and one-hundred-eighty days), with a small joint monitoring team tasked to log breaches, erect signage, and trigger reconvening if needed.

Comparing the three Plateau LGAs, the same steps are present, but different bottlenecks dominate. In Mangu, the alert-to-convening window tends to be the constraint because incident volume can spike; in that context, having pre-cleared translator rosters and standing invitation templates reduces lost time. In Riyom and Barkin Ladi, the friction often appears later, during evidence work and drafting, because land and route disputes demand boundary sketches and seasonal calendars that must be agreed clause by clause. Where municipal survey or works units are

activated early and produce visual aids, the drafting phase accelerates and the parties are more likely to converge on concrete, monitorable obligations. These contrasts reinforce a single pattern: early logistical readiness helps in high-tempo environments, while early evidence preparation helps in technically complex ones.

Documentation is the pivot that ties the front half of the cycle to the back half. Agreements that incorporate maps of corridors and water points, name specific reopening dates for markets or routes, and carry a clear escalation ladder make the monitoring team's job doable; breaches are not arguments about memory but checks against a document.

Documentation also interacts with inclusion. When women's groups and youth representatives participate in drafting, clauses that affect everyday access, school routes, market schedules, water-point sharing, tend to be clearer and easier to verify. The monitoring function then becomes an extension of what those same constituencies helped design, increasing both compliance and the speed of breach reporting.

Security coordination sits alongside, not inside, the talks. Where police, NSCDC, or Operation Safe Haven maintain a discreet protective presence outside venues and along agreed corridors during sensitive windows, conveners can keep the room civilian and dialogic without compromising safety. The division of labor is most productive when security actors are looped into follow-up schedules and signage plans so that protection

aligns with the precise places and times the agreement identifies as risky. The LGA, again, is the broker: it owns the calendar and the map and therefore can translate a clause into a patrol plan or a market-day posture without securitizing the negotiation itself.

The final component is public communication. Municipal communiqués, church and mosque announcements, and community radio spots are not mere publicity; they are extensions of enforcement. Making the terms public reduces opportunistic misinterpretation and gives non-participants a focal point for judging behavior. In several Plateau episodes, rumor spikes were tamped down not by adding more meetings but by reading out key clauses and posting signage where disputes had previously flared. The public layer also feeds back into monitoring, since breaches can now be reported against a common, widely known text rather than against each side's recollection.

Table 1 condenses the architecture and cycle into observable decision points, responsible actors, the artifacts they generate, and typical failure modes. It is not a checklist to be ticked; it is a compact way to see where interactions either compound or cancel each other out. Where the same cell is weak across rows, for example, translation or mapping, problems cascade: convenings exclude, drafting vagues out, and monitoring has nothing to reference. Where those cells are strong, each subsequent step becomes easier, and the political cost of non-compliance rises.

Table 1. Municipal Mediation Cycles.

Stage	Primary municipal role	Key partners	Core artifact(s)	Decision point that shifts outcomes	Typical failure mode	Observable indicator
Trigger & triage	Screen alert/petition; assign case lead	PPBA, Operation Rainbow	Intake log; convening list	Window between alert and first contact	Drift before contact; rumor spikes	Alert-to-convening latency (hours/days)
Convening	Issue invitations; secure venue; set translation	Traditional/religious, CSOs	Agenda; translator roster	Whether inclusion and language access are explicit	Unbalanced room; silent stakeholders	Attendance mix; languages interpreted
Pre-talks	Shuttle to cool temperature; verify must-have parties	Community leaders	Participation matrix	Whether all veto players are on board	Absent spoilers emerge later	Last-minute additions during plenary
Plenary & caucus	Ground rules; time-boxing; evidence protocol	All parties	Ground rules; evidence list	Whether evidence is defined early	Re-litigation of facts in drafting	Evidence items produced on time
Evidence work	Produce maps; pull bylaws/MoUs	Survey/Works; Area Courts	Sketch maps; prior rulings	Whether visuals anchor the debate	Ambiguous boundaries persist	Maps annexed to drafts
Drafting	Translate talk into clauses, milestones	Secretariat; parties' reps	Draft MoU; escalation ladder	Whether clauses are specific and dated	Vague commitments	Dated milestones per clause
Signature & registration	File and number the MoU; brief public	PPBA; media; faith bodies	Registered MoU; communiqué	Whether terms are legible to non-participants	Private deals unravel	Public read-outs; signage posted
Monitoring	Joint team checks; reconvene on breach	Security actors	Monitoring log; breach reports	Whether checks align with risk windows	Breaches unobserved or unaddressed	30/90/180-day reviews completed

Source: Research analysis.

Overall, the Plateau pattern is one of complementarity. Early-warning signals without rapid municipal convening do not prevent spirals; convenings without translation and inclusion do not generate consent; drafting without maps and calendars does not travel to enforcement; and monitoring without public communication does not deter opportunism. Where these components are made to work together, each reinforces the next, and the agreements

acquire the clarity and social backing required to survive beyond the room.

What Makes Agreements Stick in Plateau's LGAs

The strongest settlements in Plateau emerge when three capacities move in lockstep: inclusion that brings the right voices into the room and gives them real speaking power; legibility that turns competing narratives into

concrete, checkable terms; and follow-through that keeps pressure on compliance without securitizing the talks. Each capacity is necessary but not sufficient. Where any one is weak, the others quickly lose traction: inclusive rooms without documentation drift into selective memory; tightly drafted texts without broad buy-in fail in implementation; and rigorous monitoring without early multilingual access simply enforces a deal that key constituencies never owned.

Inclusion begins before anyone sits down. LGAs that pre-clear translator rosters, balance delegations across status and gender, and use neutral municipal venues convert the convening itself into a signal that everyone's voice will count. That signal is performative: it moderates tone, draws out quieter participants, and makes it harder for powerholders to dominate the agenda. It is also productive. The issues that women and youth raise, safe market reopening, school-route security, water-point sharing, tend to lead to clauses that are both concrete and monitorable, which in turn lowers dispute temperatures in the weeks after signature. The grain of these procedures is visible in field materials: "LGAs issue invitations, provide neutral venues, seat mixed delegations (women/youth/Ardos/district heads/market unions), and arrange simultaneous interpretation to Hausa, Berom/Mwaghavul, Fulfulde, etc." When that architecture is in place from the start, participation is not a courtesy; it is the hinge that connects social legitimacy to enforceable text.

Legibility is the second hinge. Plateau settlements are harder to game when they anchor claims to shared artifacts, sketch maps of corridors and water points, lists of prior by-

laws or area-court decisions, seasonal calendars that fix when movement or harvest will occur. These artifacts narrow the space for tactical ambiguity ("we thought the boundary was over there..."), compress drafting time, and, crucially, give monitoring teams something to check that is not memory or rumor. The pattern is consistent across land and route disputes in Riyom and Barkin Ladi: the earlier survey or works units are tasked to produce visuals, the fewer rounds of back-and-forth the parties need to settle terms. As one of the internal syntheses puts it, "Where mapping is used (e.g., sketch maps of dry-season corridors and water points), agreements show clearer obligations and fewer ambiguities." When maps are missing, the same parties tend to re-litigate "facts" at the implementation stage, which stalls signage and creates space for spoilers to claim bad faith.

Follow-through is the third hinge, and it works best when it is quiet, regular, and visible. Quiet means security support remains outside the room; regular means 30/90/180-day check-ins are treated as non-negotiable maintenance; visible means signage goes up where friction has historically spiked, and the public knows what was agreed. The division of labor is crucial here: "Liaison with Police, NSCDC, or Operation Safe Haven (Plateau) allows protection around markets, routes, or returnee sites while keeping uniformed presence outside the negotiating room." Kept at arm's length, security amplifies civilian agreements rather than substituting for them. Meanwhile, a predictable monitoring cadence transforms enforcement from a one-off reaction to a habit; parties anticipate checks, and community members know when and where to report breaches. LGAs that pair this

cadence with a public read-out short-circuit rumor mills and create social costs for non-compliance.

Speed matters, but only as part of a sequence. In Mangu, where incident volume can surge, the shortest alert-to-convening windows are achieved by pre-positioning the mundane parts of inclusion, translator rosters, standard invitation language, and a standing agenda skeleton. Speed on its own merely gets people into a hot room faster; speed with preparation gives that first hour the structure to cool temperatures and to separate what can be settled now from what needs evidence work before drafting. In contrast, Riyom and Barkin Ladi often gain more from an early investment in legibility. Asking survey units to draft the corridor map and the seasonal calendar before the first plenary reduces the temptation to re-open factual disputes during drafting. In both settings, speed is the accelerant; it is the quality of what arrives on time, balanced participation and usable evidence, that determines whether the process turns the corner.

Registration and public communication are the bridge between text and practice. Settlements that are filed, numbered, and stored, physically and digitally, are easier to retrieve and defend when personnel rotate or when disputes recur. Public communiqués convert the agreement into a community focal point. When clauses are read in churches and mosques and aired on community radio, backsliding shifts from private interpretation to visible breach. That visibility not only deters opportunism but also supports constructive pressure from those who were not in the room. Traders can point to market-day reopening clauses; parents can point to

school-route provisions; herders and farmers can point to corridor signage timelines. Without that public layer, even well-drafted texts struggle to produce the steady social nudges that keep cooperation intact.

The interactions among these capacities are multiplicative. Inclusion without legibility can produce warm process and thin text; legibility without inclusion can generate technically elegant but socially brittle agreements; follow-through without the first two enforces a settlement that parties find either unclear or unfair. The most durable outcomes arise when inclusion generates pragmatic content (women's and youth priorities embedded in clauses), legibility encodes that content into timelines and maps, and follow-through disciplines expectations and behavior over time. The result is not the absence of friction, breaches still occur, but a narrowing of the breach-to-response window and a thickening of the social coalition that treats the text as binding.

There are also distinct failure cascades to guard against. When translation is improvised, silent stakeholders remain silent in the room and vocal outside it; the agreement then enters a hostile information environment where opponents can frame it as imposed. When evidence is thin, parties relitigate facts at the monitoring stage, eroding confidence in the whole process. When registration is skipped or the public read-out is delayed, political cycles and personnel changes erase institutional memory; monitoring teams find themselves enforcing a document that no one can readily locate. Each of these failures can be traced to an earlier decision point: translation and seating at convening; mapping at evidence work; filing and read-out at

signature. Seeing the cycle as a chain of interdependent choices is what enables LGAs to invest effort where it has the highest downstream payoff.

Finally, the strongest cases in Plateau show that design choices travel across conflict types. The same three hinges, inclusion, legibility, follow-through, work in land and route disputes as well as in market-day and returnee-access negotiations. The content of the clauses changes, but the architecture that makes them credible does not. When LGAs act on that regularity, they waste less time reinventing procedures and more time solving the local problem at hand. As one synthesis of practice notes, “implementing 30-, 90-, and 180-day follow-up sessions, providing hotline numbers, posting signage along key corridors, and rapidly reconvening in response to reported breaches are recommended best practices.”

Portability and Limits: How the Municipal Model Travels to Adamawa and Taraba

When the Plateau model leaves its core institutional habitat and enters the borderland districts of Adamawa (Numan–Demsā) and Taraba (Sardauna/Mambilla Plateau), the same three hinges, inclusion, legibility, and follow-through, still drive durability, but each requires a different mix of adaptations. The comparative payoff of looking beyond Plateau is that constraints are more visible. Multilingual communities, seasonal cross-border movements, and jurisdictional overlaps with Cameroon intensify the costs of design shortcuts. Where LGAs invest early in language access, evidence that travels across jurisdictions, and a predictable post-agreement

cadence, municipal settlements remain intelligible and enforceable even as actors rotate and borders breathe. Where they do not, every friction point in Plateau becomes a failure cascade in the borderlands.

In Adamawa’s Numan–Demsā axis, inclusion starts as a translation problem and ends as a coalition problem. Communities are religiously and linguistically heterogeneous; convenings that merely “represent” groups without guaranteeing language access perform inclusion on paper but not in practice. The strongest episodes here borrow directly from Plateau’s procedural spine but shift two parameters. First, translation is treated as an infrastructure: interpreters are recruited before invitations go out, and the running order of speakers is built to alternate across language and status to prevent agenda capture. Second, municipal conveners explicitly co-chair with interfaith civic platforms during plenaries, then return ownership to LGAs for drafting, registration, and follow-up. This sequencing keeps the room legitimate without outsourcing the text. It is exactly the configuration described in the internal synthesis: “LGAs issue invitations, provide neutral venues, seat mixed delegations (women/youth/Ardos/district heads/market unions), and arrange simultaneous interpretation to Hausa, Berom/Mwaghavul, Fulfulde, etc.” The interaction to notice is that multilingual access does more than make people comfortable; it improves the specificity of what gets written because more of the “practical” claims, market hours, school-route timings, water-point schedules, enter the draft early.

Taraba’s Sardauna/Mambilla problem set is different. Here, legibility is the binding

constraint because corridor use, grazing, and market access can straddle a porous international boundary. The best municipal settlements in this terrain are those that treat maps, calendars, and signage not as annexes but as the agreement's main text. When survey units prepare sketch maps before the first plenary, drafting time drops and post-signature monitoring becomes a matter of verifying waypoints rather than relitigating allegations. The pattern is captured succinctly in the materials: "Where mapping is used (e.g., sketch maps of dry-season corridors and water points), agreements show clearer obligations and fewer ambiguities." Conversely, when maps are delayed or omitted, monitors end up enforcing memories, and every patrol becomes a negotiation. In other words, evidence that is not spatialized cannot anchor an agreement whose object is movement.

Follow-through travels well but only if it remains civilian in tone and precise in time. Borderland LGAs that front-load the calendar, thirty, ninety, and one-hundred-eighty-day reviews; signage deadlines; public read-outs tied to market days, convert an otherwise sprawling enforcement problem into a series of small, scheduled coordination problems. Two design details make the difference. First, the protective presence of police, NSCDC, or, where relevant, joint task forces is kept outside the room and aligned to the specific corridors and market-day windows named in the MoU; this preserves the texture of dialogue while underwriting safety. As the consolidation memo puts it, "Liaison with Police, NSCDC, or Operation Safe Haven (Plateau) allows protection around markets, routes, or returnee sites while keeping uniformed presence outside the

negotiating room." Second, the monitoring cadence is announced publicly at signature, which removes the politics from "why now?" requests and creates shared expectations about when frictions will be observed and addressed. The same memo underlines the routine: "implementing 30-, 90-, and 180-day follow-up sessions, providing hotline numbers, posting signage along key corridors, and rapidly reconvening in response to reported breaches are recommended best practices."

Across both borderland vignettes, public communication functions as an enforcement multiplier. Announcements in churches and mosques, community radio spots, and physical signage turn the agreement into a focal point that non-participants can cite. In Adamawa, this shrinks rumor space around interfaith provisions; in Taraba, it makes corridor rules intelligible to mobile actors who were not in the room but bear the costs of misinterpretation. Public read-outs also protect against personnel churn: when the text is socialized, it is harder for a change in local government officers or traditional council members to unravel the deal quietly. The broader logic is that a public document creates a constituency for compliance beyond the signatories, and that constituency shows up as "ambient" monitoring, breaches are reported quickly because more eyes know what "breach" means.

The comparative lens also clarifies what does not travel. Rapid convening without prior evidence work performs well in Mangu but underperforms in Sardauna, where the facts under dispute are spatial and seasonal and cannot be negotiated without a map. Likewise, a reliance on charismatic conveners can

sustain momentum in Plateau where PPBA and Operation Rainbow provide scaffolding; in Adamawa, where the civic interfaith layer is thicker, that charisma must be paired with shared chairing to avoid claims of bias. The lesson is not that speed or charisma are unhelpful; it is that each must be paired with the constraint that dominates the context, evidence in Taraba, coalition breadth in Adamawa, otherwise the settlement will revert to the mean.

Finally, the trade-off between thin process and thick text becomes sharper under borderland conditions. In Plateau, a well-drafted text can sometimes compensate for a

less inclusive room because institutions are available to socialize and enforce the result. In Adamawa and Taraba, the reverse is true: a warm, inclusive plenary cannot compensate for a thin text because enforcement must often travel across language groups and jurisdictions where only maps, dates, and signage are legible. The practical implication for municipal teams is to diagnose the binding constraint early and overweight effort there, knowing that the other hinges will benefit indirectly. This is what makes the “kit” portable: not a fixed protocol, but a method for deciding where specificity pays the highest downstream dividends (Table 2).

Table 2. Portability of the LGA Mediation Model Across Plateau, Adamawa, and Taraba.

Region & conflict ecology	Binding constraint	Adaptation that unlocks durability	What to watch	Early warning of drift	Outcome signal
Plateau (Mangu; mixed dispute types)	Volume and tempo	Pre-positioned invitation & translator rosters; standing agenda skeleton	Alert-to-convening window	Slippage between alert and first contact	Fewer rumor spikes; on-time first sessions
Adamawa (Numan–Demsa; interfaith & riverine)	Multilingual inclusion	Co-chairing with interfaith platforms; alternating speaker order across language/status	Voices that generate “practical” clauses	Interpreters improvised on the day	More clauses on market, school-route, water access
Taraba (Sardauna/Mambilla; cross-border corridors)	Spatial legibility	Maps and calendars prepared before plenary; signage timelines embedded in text	Map annexes referenced in drafting	“We’ll map it later” becomes a habit	Faster drafting; fewer boundary relitigations

Source: Research analysis.

Three interview quotes from the field materials capture these dynamics crisply. First, on inclusion as infrastructure: “LGAs issue invitations, provide neutral venues, seat mixed delegations (women/youth/Ardos/district heads/market unions), and arrange simultaneous interpretation to Hausa, Berom/Mwaghavul, Fulfulde, etc.” Second, on legibility as the antidote to tactical ambiguity: “Where mapping is used (e.g., sketch maps of dry-season corridors and

water points), agreements show clearer obligations and fewer ambiguities.” Third, on the cadence that turns enforcement from a reaction into a habit: “implementing 30-, 90-, and 180-day follow-up sessions, providing hotline numbers, posting signage along key corridors, and rapidly reconvening in response to reported breaches are recommended best practices.”

Viewed together, these vignettes confirm that the municipal model does travel, but only when it is reweighted to match each context's binding constraint. In Adamawa, inclusion that is audible and alternates power in the room produces text that communities can own; in Taraba, evidence that is map-first makes mobility rules enforceable across borders; in both, follow-through that is civilian and calendared supplies the rhythm that keeps bargains alive after the signatures dry.

Municipal Peace Infrastructures as Meso-Level Engines in a Polycentric Order

The findings demonstrate that municipal mediation in Plateau operates as a meso-level brokerage function inside a polycentric governance field, translating signals from early warning systems and community petitions into procedures and artifacts that other actors can recognize, endorse, and enforce. This pattern directly animates the polycentric governance claim that problem-solving capacity is dispersed and must be coordinated across levels rather than centralized in a single node (Ostrom 2010). In our cases, LGAs are neither street-level NGOs nor distant state ministries: they are bridging nodes that connect state scaffolding (PPBA, Operation Rainbow) to community legitimacy (traditional and religious authorities, civic groups), which is precisely the everyday, situated locus of peace practice described in the “local turn” literature (Mac Ginty 2021; Autesserre 2021).

At the heart of this brokerage is procedural fairness. When LGAs pre-commit to translation, balanced seating, neutral venues,

and visible rules of engagement, participants experience the process as predictable and impartial. That experience matters not as a normative flourish but as a driver of compliance: people tend to obey outcomes they perceive as fair, even when outcomes are imperfect for them personally (Tyler 2006). What our material adds is a concrete list of municipal levers, translator rosters, seating scripts, agenda time-boxing, that turn the abstract promise of procedural justice into practice. In collaborative governance terms, LGAs are cultivating principled engagement and shared motivation while structuring joint problem solving, which is the pathway by which collaborative forums generate implementable agreements (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015).

The second connection to theory concerns legibility. Durable settlements in our cases were those that turned claims into shared artifacts, maps of routes and water points, seasonal calendars, dated milestones, and public communiqués. Such artifacts reduce ambiguity and shrink the space for opportunistic reinterpretation by introducing common reference points for non-participants and for future officials. While the classic “legibility” critique warns against imposing top-down simplifications, our cases illustrate a bottom-up version: communities and municipal officers co-produce legibility to make cooperative behavior observable and thus enforceable (de Coning 2018). In an adaptive peacebuilding frame, these artifacts enable iteration, monitoring teams can compare reality against agreed waypoints and recalibrate without re-opening first principles (de Coning 2018). This is where municipal proximity to survey units and bylaw

repositories becomes an institutional advantage, not just an administrative detail.

A third theoretical bridge is signal processing in polycentric systems. Early warning has value only to the extent that the latency between an alert and the first, language-accessible convening is short. Our findings propose “alert-to-talks latency” as a tractable indicator of municipal readiness and of the quality of inter-node handoffs inside a peace infrastructure. This is a practical operationalization of the broader claim that polycentric orders succeed when information moves quickly to decision points that have capacity and legitimacy to act (Ostrom 2010). By specifying how an LGA reduces rumor cascades, rapid triage, summons authority, and pre-positioned translators, the study adds causal texture to adaptive, decentralized response rather than assuming that “more EWER” is automatically better.

The civilian primacy of municipal mediation further clarifies the division of labor between dialogue and protection. Patrols aligned to times and places specified in agreements, but kept outside the room, preserved the civilian character of talks while deterring spoilers. This hybrid arrangement resonates with the “everyday peace” emphasis on civilian agency and habitual routines, showing how state coercive capacity can be bounded to support rather than overshadow local solutions (Mac Ginty 2021; Autesserre 2021). It also refines institutionalist claims by showing that who enforces what matters: municipal chairs own calendars and maps; security forces own patrols; PPBA-like bodies own synchronization and public messaging. Putting the right tool at the right node is the meso-

level design problem, not a generic “coordination” mantra.

The portability analysis sharpens scope conditions for municipal peace infrastructures. In Adamawa’s Numan–Demsá axis, inclusion is not achieved by representative lists alone; it requires treating translation as infrastructure and rotating voice deliberately. In Taraba’s Sardauna/Mambilla, where disputes are spatial and seasonal and actors move across a porous border, the agreement’s main text must be maps and calendars, not narrative prose. These adaptations align with hybrid governance accounts that find durable order where statutory and customary institutions co-produce rules that are intelligible across communities and jurisdictions (Boege et al. 2009; Meagher 2012). The theoretical contribution here is to specify what must be reweighted for the model to travel: voice engineering in highly multilingual settings; evidence-first drafting in corridor disputes; and calendared, public-facing follow-up wherever personnel churn and rumor threaten implementation.

Institutional routinization emerges as an additional axis of contribution. Kaduna’s Peace Commission law represents a formal route to municipalization, defining mandates, reporting lines, and quotas at LGA level, whereas Plateau approximates routinization through an agency–forum architecture (PPBA and C/CPAF) coupled to EWER practice. The two routes converge on the same mechanics we observe, templates, budget lines, monitoring cadences, which suggests that institutionalization should be defined functionally rather than only legally: as the presence of standard operating procedures, resourcing, and public metrics that reduce

reliance on charismatic conveners and inoculate mediation against political turnover (Cleen Foundation 2023; Kew 2021).

External causal evidence supports the plausibility of these municipal mechanics. A randomized evaluation in North-Central Nigeria found that training local leaders in interest-based mediation and structured dialogues reduced violence exposure and improved perceived security, with follow-on work showing that the mediation “slice” of the package contributed most to durable effects (Mercy Corps 2022; Mercy Corps 2024). While our study does not estimate average treatment effects, the process-tracing evidence explains *how* inclusion, legibility, and follow-through combine to lower recurrence and compress breach-to-response windows, precisely the micro-foundations missing in many program evaluations.

Two broader theoretical implications follow. First, at the level of everyday peace, we specify the micro-infrastructure, translator rosters, seating plans, map annexes, calendared reviews, public read-outs, by which LGAs convert local legitimacy into compliance. This moves the conversation from generic invocations of “local ownership” to a replicable set of municipal practices that can be resourced and monitored (Autesserre 2021; Guéhenno 2015; Goetze 2016). Second, for polycentric governance, we show that dispersed authority requires disciplined intermediation: without a meso-level broker, early warning becomes a data exhaust and community legitimacy remains parochial. LGAs are that broker in Plateau, and can be elsewhere, provided that translation, mapping, and monitoring are funded as core municipal functions and that performance is tracked

with public indicators such as alert-to-talks latency and milestone completion rates (Ostrom 2010; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015).

Policy design follows naturally from these connections. States can adopt a legal backbone (à la Kaduna) or a robust agency–forum model (à la Plateau); both should institutionalize translator rosters and map-first drafting, finance routine monitoring and public read-outs, and keep security calibrated outside the room. Such designs operationalize collaborative governance regimes, principled engagement, shared motivation, joint capacity, while aligning with adaptive peacebuilding’s insistence on iterative adjustment under uncertainty (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; de Coning 2018). In other words, the municipal “kit” we observed is not a checklist to be transplanted but a set of weighted design choices that, when matched to context, make polycentric peace architectures work.

Conclusion

This study finally shows that LGAs function as meso-level brokers that turn early warnings and community claims into fair procedures, legible agreements, and disciplined follow-through, three hinges that make settlements stick and travel across contexts when reweighted to local constraints. Our analysis is limited by partial access to security/EWER data, potential selection into tractable disputes, political turnover, and seasonality in borderlands. Future research should test causal links between alert-to-talks latency and recurrence, assess cost-effectiveness of municipal mediation, compare codified versus agency-led institutionalization, track longitudinal outcomes with public metrics,

examine gendered and youth impacts on compliance, and study how digital rumor dynamics interact with monitoring and enforcement.

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