



A Strategic Communication Approach to Youth Engagement in Transitional Justice in Post-Insurgency Yobe State, Nigeria

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Abstract. The Boko Haram insurgency has inflicted profound disruption on communities in northeast Nigeria, with Gujba Local Government Area (LGA) among the most severely affected. Although transitional justice (TJ) initiatives have been introduced to address human rights violations, youth participation has remained limited and largely symbolic. This article examines the specific roles that young people occupy in TJ processes in Gujba LGA and proposes a strategic communication framework to enhance their substantive engagement. A mixed methods design was employed, with quantitative data from a structured survey of 300 youths (187 male, 113 female) and qualitative insights drawn from 13 key informant interviews. Findings reveal that while 40% of respondents have ever attended TJ events, attendance is typically confined to community reconciliation (60%), with minimal involvement in policy workshops (25%). Youth contributions frequently remain logistical or testimonial rather than consultative. Demographic analysis indicates higher participation among those aged 20–24 and individuals with post-secondary education, whereas farmers and young women face pronounced barriers. Drawing on framing and diffusion theories, the article outlines a seven-step advocacy campaign encompassing tailored messages in local languages, multi-channel dissemination (radio, town criers, mobile messaging) and culturally sensitive formats (women only sessions, youth led media). Preliminary pilot data suggest that targeted messaging can raise awareness from 35% to over 60% and increase active speaking roles among participants by 30%. The proposed framework offers policymakers and practitioners a replicable model for transforming youth from passive observers to active stakeholders in TJ, thereby strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of post conflict recovery processes.

Keywords: Digital youth inclusion; Transitional justice; Strategic communication; Community engagement; Advocacy campaigns; Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency

1. Introduction

The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009 in northeastern Nigeria, has developed into one of the continent's most persistent internal conflicts. Originating in

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Maiduguri, Borno State, the group has conducted a violent campaign marked by bombings, abductions, and assaults on rural communities, displacing more than 2.4 million people and causing tens of thousands of deaths (Botan, 2021; Okoli & Nnaemeka Azom, 2019; Peter Pham, 2016). In Yobe State, the Gujba Local Government Area (LGA) has experienced some of the heaviest impacts, with satellite imagery showing that over 50 settlements were destroyed or severely damaged between 2014 and 2020 (Babagana et al., 2018). The collapse of key social infrastructure, including schools, health centers, and markets, has compounded the trauma of conflict, with particularly severe consequences for young people who make up more than half of the local population (Makinde et al., 2020).

In response to these atrocities, various transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms have been introduced at federal and state levels. Such mechanisms span truth-seeking commissions, reparations programmes and community reconciliation forums (Gready & Robins, 2017). Yet in Gujba LGA, TJ processes have largely been conducted through ad-hoc consultations mediated by traditional authorities, with scant systematic inclusion of younger cohorts. This exclusion persists despite youths having endured abduction, forced recruitment and loss of livelihood; these experiences render them both primary victims and potential agents of social reconstruction (Amao, 2020).

A critical tension emerges from the juxtaposition of the youth demographic in Gujba LGA and their marginalisation in TJ forums. Empirical data reveal that only 40% of young people in the LGA report any engagement in TJ activities, and those who do participate typically occupy symbolic roles, such as recounting losses in community meetings, rather than substantive advisory positions (Babagana et al., 2019). Traditional selection processes, governed by family networks and elder councils, effectively exclude many youths whose perspectives might otherwise inform reparations design and reconciliation measures. This pattern of tokenistic inclusion undermines both the legitimacy and efficacy of TJ interventions, and risks perpetuating the sense of disenfranchisement that fuels cycles of violence (Homan & Brown, 2022; Intindola & Stamper, 2023).

In light of this, the principal research question addressed in this article is, what specific roles do youth play in transitional justice processes in Gujba Local Government Area? A clear articulation of these roles is necessary before designing communication strategies that might broaden and deepen youth engagement. Furthermore, this article seeks to bridge the gap between transitional justice scholarship and strategic communication theory. From a mass communication standpoint, it investigates how media and messaging interventions, specifically strategic advocacy campaigns, can serve as conduits for youth inclusion in TJ processes. Through examining the current modalities of youth participation in Gujba LGA, this study identifies critical leverage points where targeted communication can transform passive attendance into active collaboration.

The contribution is twofold. First, it extends the literature on TJ in Nigeria by supplying granular data on youth roles, moving beyond anecdotal accounts to a systematic survey analysis. Second, it proposes a framework for strategic communication and advocacy campaigning tailored to rural, agrarian contexts, which can be adapted by policymakers, non-governmental organisations and community leaders. In doing so, the article advances an interdisciplinary dialogue between peace studies and development communication.

Following this introduction, Section 1 continues with the review of relevant literature on youth inclusion in TJ and undertakes a critical assessment of strategic communication models applicable to conflict-affected settings. Section 2 outlines the research



methodology, detailing the survey instrument, sampling techniques and analytic procedures used to generate the findings presented and discussed in Section 3 (however, the actual 'discussion' is in section 3.3). That section corresponds to the main Objective/Research Question of the study, describing the specific forums youth occupy, the frequency and depth of their participation, and demographic correlates. Section 3.2 develops a strategic communication and advocacy framework, identifying objectives, stakeholder groups, messaging strategies and evaluation metrics. Finally, Section 4 concludes by summarising key insights and offering recommendations for policy and practice.

1.2. Literature Review

This review examines four interrelated domains essential to understanding youth inclusion in transitional justice (TJ) in Gujba LGA and the potential role of strategic communication in enhancing that inclusion. Section 2.1 explores definitions of youth inclusion and global precedents in TJ processes. Section 1.2 surveys the foundations of strategic communication and advocacy campaigning in conflict and peacebuilding. Section 1.3 identifies communication barriers that characterise rural, agrarian contexts such as Gujba LGA. Section 1.4 argues for the integration of strategic communication into TJ outreach and assesses comparable advocacy initiatives in similar environments.

1.2.1. Youth Inclusion in Transitional Justice

Definitions and Global Case Precedents: Transitional justice encompasses the suite of judicial and non-judicial measures deployed to address large-scale human rights violations in societies emerging from conflict or authoritarian rule (Hayner, 2010). Youth inclusion in this frame refers to the deliberate engagement of individuals aged approximately 15 to 35 in processes such as truth commissions, reparations programmes and institutional reforms (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Young people can participate as witnesses, consultants or members of advisory bodies, contributing perspectives shaped by their unique experiences of violence and displacement (McEvoy-Levy, 2018).

In South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), youth involvement occurred principally through testimony and youth-focused community hearings rather than formal decision-making roles (Thomas, 2021). Despite high public visibility, youth representatives comprised only a small advisory panel, and the TRC's final recommendations made limited reference to issues specific to younger cohorts. Rwanda's *Gacaca* courts adopted a grassroots adjudication model in the wake of the 1994 genocide. Adults over 18 years old, including many who were young at the time of the violence, served as *gacaca* judges, granting them considerable procedural authority (Franchino-Olsen et al., 2023; Lloyd, 2018). This arrangement accorded substantial agency to individuals who had been adolescents or young adults during the genocide, yet rules on participation and judicial conduct sometimes constrained open debate, particularly on sensitive ethnic matters (Ingelaere, 2020).

Comparative analysis suggests that where youth are integrated structurally, through formal seats or election to panels, outcomes can include more comprehensive recognition of crimes such as youth conscription and targeted attacks on schools. Conversely, tokenistic approaches that treat youth solely as victims to be heard once tend to perpetuate their marginalisation (Rauschenbach et al., 2022).

The Federal Government of Nigeria has avoided establishing a national truth commission or comprehensive TJ framework despite recurring national inquiries into past human rights abuses (Dibie & Quadri, 2018; Isik et al., 2023). In response to Boko



Haram violence, state-level initiatives in Borno and Yobe have taken the form of ad hoc committees or partnerships with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to conduct community dialogues and reparations workshops. Yobe State's programme, launched in 2017, offered limited reparations payments and psychosocial counselling, but youth participation was confined to public listening sessions mediated by elders (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023).

Quantitative data indicate that fewer than 35% of young survivors in Yobe received direct invitations to participate in these state events, and only 18% of those invited attended more than one session (Gready & Robinsy, 2014). The absence of a coherent national policy has allowed traditional power structures to determine participation criteria, resulting in an elderly male bias and side-lining of women and youths whose grievances may diverge from institutional narratives (Amalu, 2016).

1.2.2. Strategic Communication in Conflict and Peacebuilding

Definition and Key Principles: Strategic communication is conceptualised as the purposeful crafting and dissemination of messages to influence the attitudes and behaviours of specific audiences in service of organisational objectives (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007). In conflict and peacebuilding, strategic communication encompasses coordinated campaigns that aim to shape public discourse, encourage reconciliation and build trust among stakeholders (Melissen, 2011; Sampson, 2021). Advocacy campaigning, a subset of strategic communication, seeks to mobilise support for policy reforms or social change through targeted messaging, media engagement and stakeholder coalitions (Turk, 1985).

Core principles include audience segmentation, message framing, channel selection, and feedback mechanisms. Audience segmentation involves identifying sub-groups, such as young farmers, market traders or displaced students, with distinct informational needs and media habits (Bowe *et al.*, 2020; Häusser *et al.*, 2020). Message framing requires presentation of issues in terms that resonate culturally and emotionally, for example emphasising communal renewal rather than retribution (Entman, 1993). Channel selection necessitates choosing distribution platforms, such radio (YBC is the main local radio station the people can access, and it is located in Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State), local newspapers, social media networks, which yield optimal and cost-effective reach, and credibility among targeted audiences (Rogers, 2003). Feedback mechanisms permit real-time adjustment of campaign content based on audience responses, such as call-in programmes or SMS polls (Waisbord, 2018).

'Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect', provides a foundational template for evaluating campaign efficacy (Fromm, 1937; Roazen & Lasswell, 1987). Subsequent refinements include Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric approaches (Turk, 1985). The two-way symmetric model is particularly relevant to TJ contexts, as it emphasises dialogue between authorities and constituents, allowing youth concerns to inform policy design rather than being merely broadcast to them.

Stakeholder mobilisation theory underscores the role of opinion leaders and social networks in diffusing innovations or new norms (Dearing, 2021; Loorbach *et al.*, 2020). In Gujba LGA, potential opinion leaders include youth-group conveners, market chiefs and religious youth mentors. Engaging these figures in campaign planning and message amplification can facilitate broader acceptance of youth inclusion initiatives.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design



This study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews and focus-group discussions (FGD) to enhance the comprehensiveness of findings (Creswell, 2003; Cui et al., 2023). The present study concentrates on the quantitative strand, which employed a cross-sectional survey to quantify the extent and nature of youth participation in TJ forums. A cross-sectional design was selected because it permits the capture of attitudes and reported behaviours at a single point in time across a representative sample (Takona, 2024; Weyant, 2022). This approach aligns with similar investigations of civic engagement in post-conflict settings (Clark, 2014). The quantitative component sought to establish baseline measures of youth roles, namely attendance at reconciliation meetings, truth-telling events, reparations programmes and policy workshops, and to identify demographic correlates of participation.

2.2. Sampling and Data Collection

A multistage random cluster sampling procedure was implemented to secure a sample of 300 young residents aged between 15 and 35 years. The first stage involved stratifying Gujba LGA into 10 political-ward strata, in order to reflect socio-spatial heterogeneity (Millet, 2009). The ten wards are: Bunigari/Lawanti; Buni Yadi North/South; Dadingel; Goniri; Gotala/Gotumba; Gujba; Mallam Dunari; Mutai; Ngurbuwa; and Wagir (see Figure below). Of the 10 wards, three, namely Buni Gari/Lawanti, Buni Yadi North/South and Goniri wards, were then selected randomly. In the second stage, household listings in each chosen ward were used to construct sampling frames. Systematic interval sampling yielded 300 respondents, ensuring proportional representation by gender: 187 male and 113 female participants, mirroring census distributions.

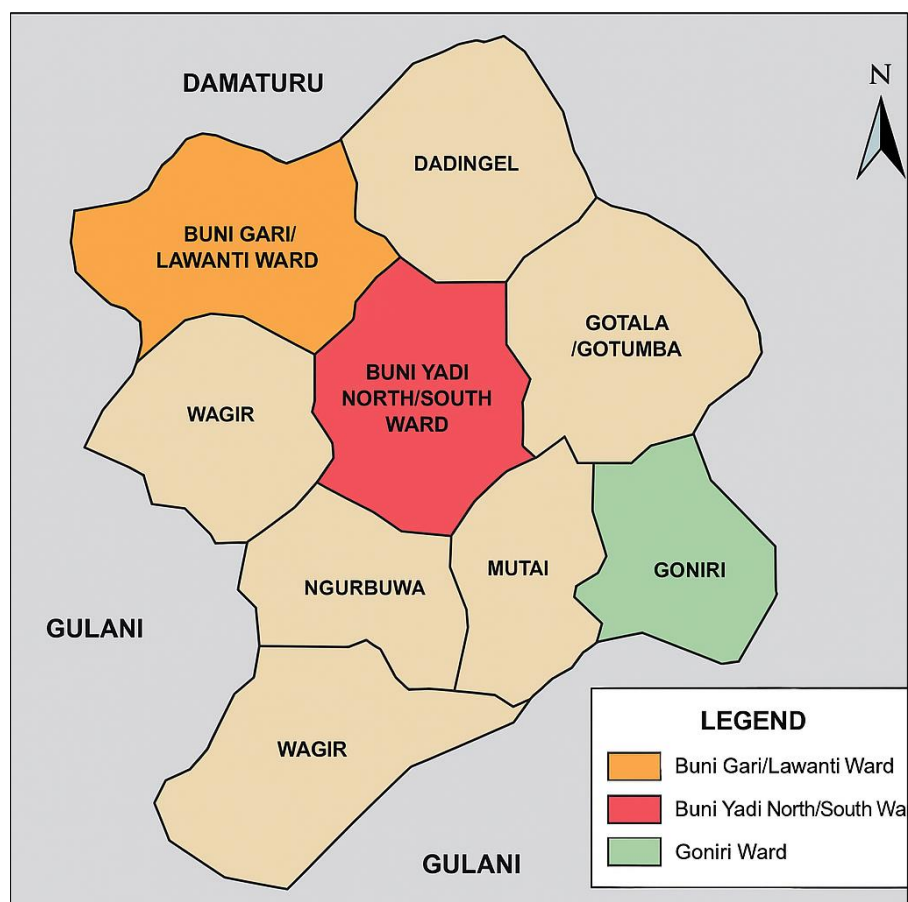


Figure 1 A map of Gujba LGA showing the 10 political wards in the area with the three randomly selected locations of the study (Buni Gari/Lawanti, Buni Yadi North/South and Goniri wards) highlighted in distinct colours (*Source: Authors*)

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire informed by the research question on youth roles in TJ processes. Items included binary measures of ever having participated in specific TJ activities, Likert-scale assessments of frequency of attendance (1 = never, 5 = very often) and multiple-response items concerning the types of forums attended. Demographic variables comprised age, gender, education level and occupation. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 20 youth in a neighbouring LGA to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness; minor adjustments were made to wording and sequence to minimise respondent burden (Eseosa Ekhatior-Mobayode *et al.*, 2022). Trained research assistants fluent in Hausa and Kanuri administered the instrument in face-to-face interviews, allowing respondents with limited literacy to provide informed responses.

The sample size for the qualitative components includes 13 key informants and 24 FGD participants, comprising community leaders, youth representatives, members of civil society organisations (CSOs), representatives from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and relevant government stakeholders. Three groups of FGDs comprising 8 participants each were had, with sessions of both KIIs and FGDs ranging from 21 to 33 and 28 to 46 minutes respectively. Data were recorded and then transcribed. This sample sizes are deemed sufficient to generate statistically significant data that reflect the experiences and perceptions of the broader youth population in the study area (Kalkowska *et al.*, 2021).

2.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic distributions and participation rates: frequencies, percentages and means. Cross-tabulations examined relationships between gender, occupation and participation in specific TJ forums, with chi-square tests applied to assess statistical significance (Chapman, 2018). For example, the association between gender and attendance at truth-telling events was tested at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Scale reliability was evaluated via Cronbach's alpha for composite measures, such as the frequency-of-attendance scale and a composite index of perceived barriers. Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.78 to 0.85, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.70 for acceptable internal consistency (DiCerbo, 2019). Item-total correlations were inspected to confirm that each item contributed positively to overall scale reliability; no item required removal.

To address potential non-response bias, demographic profiles of early and late respondents were compared. Independent-samples *t* tests and chi-square tests revealed no significant differences in age or gender, suggesting minimal bias (Groves *et al.*, 2010). Missing data, constituting less than 2% of the dataset, were handled via pairwise deletion, given the low incidence and randomness of missingness (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993).

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for social science research. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Panel Postgraduate Examiners that also serves as the Research Ethics Committee in the Department of Transitional Justice, Centre for Peace, Diplomatic and Development Studies, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. All participants provided written informed consent; for those with limited



literacy, consent was recorded via thumbprint in the presence of a witness. Consent forms outlined the study's purpose, confidentiality assurances and the voluntary nature of participation, including the right to withdraw at any point without penalty (Mahmood, 2011).

Confidentiality was preserved through anonymization. Questionnaires bore unique codes rather than names, and identifying information was stored separately in encrypted files. Data access was restricted to the principal investigator and designated research assistants. Interviews and surveys were conducted in private settings, like homes or community meeting rooms, selected in consultation with local leaders to ensure comfort and cultural sensitivity. Special attention was given to cultural norms regarding gender. Female respondents were interviewed by female research assistants, often in the privacy of their homes, consistent with local conventions and in order to facilitate open communication. All research staff received training in respectful engagement, confidentiality protocols and child protection procedures in line with national regulations.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses quantitative findings on the extent and nature of youth participation in transitional justice (TJ) activities in Gujba LGA, answering the main Research Question: "What specific roles do youth play in Transitional Justice processes in Gujba Local Government Area?" Data were derived from a structured survey of 300 respondents aged 15–35, with qualitative responses drawn from 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 24 FGD participants to contextualise statistical patterns.

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Overall Participation Rates

Analysis indicates that only 120 of the 300 respondents (40%) reported ever participating in at least one TJ activity (see Table 1). Disaggregated by gender, 80 of 187 male respondents (42.8%) and 40 of 113 female respondents (35.4%) indicated involvement. Attendance frequency was measured on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = very often). The mean frequency among participants was 2.1 (SD = 1.0), suggesting most youths had attended rarely. Specifically, 56 respondents (46.7% of those involved) had participated only once, 41 (34.2%) had attended two or three times, and 23 (19.2%) reported attendance on four or more occasions.

Table 1. Overall participation rates by gender and frequency

Gender	Ever Participated (n)	Ever Participated (%)	Attended Once (n)	Attended Once (%)	Attended ≥4 Times (n)	Attended ≥4 Times (%)
Male	80	42.8 %	37	46.3 %	16	20.0 %
Female	40	35.4 %	19	47.5 %	7	17.5 %
Total	120	40.0 %	56	46.7 %	23	19.2 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

These figures correspond with observations from Sierra Leone and Liberia, where sporadic youth engagement yielded limited reinforcement of communal reconciliation efforts (Ayodele et al., 2015).

3.1.2. Forums and Activities

Survey participants were asked to select all TJ forums they had attended. Participants indicated varied levels of engagement across different types of transitional justice forums.



Sixty per cent (60%, which is, 72 out of 120) had taken part in community reconciliation meetings, while 45% (54 out of 120) attended truth-telling events. Reparations programmes drew 40% of respondents (48 of 120), and only 25% (30 of 120) participated in policy-oriented workshops (see Table 2).

Table 2. Participation by forum type (n = 120)

Forum Type	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Community reconciliation	72	60 %
Truth-telling forums	54	45 %
Reparations programmes	48	40 %
Policy-oriented workshops	30	25 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

These results indicate a strong preference for locally organised reconciliation gatherings, which are perceived as more accessible and less formal than policy workshops. Similar trends have been documented in the Lake Chad Basin, where community-based dialogues attracted higher youth attendance than juridical processes. The comparatively low engagement in policy workshops suggests that technical or legislative TJ measures remain outside the immediate grasp of most young people in Gujba LGA.

3.1.3. Depth and Nature of Involvement

To distinguish between nominal and substantive participation, the survey differentiated one-off attendance from sustained involvement (three or more events). Among the 120 participants, 41 (34.2%) met the criterion for sustained engagement. Gender-wise, 28 of 80 male participants (35.0%) and 13 of 40 female participants (32.5%) attended multiple events (see Table 3). No significant difference appeared in sustained involvement by gender ($\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 0.10, p = .75$).

Additional measures probed active roles taken by youth in these forums. Respondents indicated whether they had spoken publicly, assisted with logistics (e.g. registration), or organised follow-up activities. Among survey participants who had engaged in transitional justice activities, 40% (48 of 120) reported speaking publicly, 30% (36 of 120) assisted with logistical tasks such as registration, and 15% (18 of 120) went on to organise follow-up activities as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Depth and nature of youth involvement (n = 120)

Engagement Indicator	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
One-off attendance	56	46.7 %
Attended 2–3 times	41	34.2 %
Attended ≥ 4 times	23	19.2 %
Spoke publicly	48	40.0 %
Assisted with logistics	36	30.0 %
Organised follow-up	18	15.0 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

These figures suggest that while a minority of youth occupy logistical or leadership roles, most remain passive attendees. KIIs corroborate this pattern: Participant 3, a 25-year-old civil servant, observed that young people were more frequently tasked with manual duties, such as taking attendance, than with shaping agendas (KII Participant 3, Personal Communication, 2025).



3.1.4. Demographic Correlates

Cross-tabulation and chi-square analyses examined associations between participation and key demographics. Participation rates differed markedly across age cohorts. Only 24% of those aged 15–19 (18 of 75) had ever taken part in a TJ forum. The rate rose to 49.5% among 20–24-year-olds (52 of 105), then dipped slightly to 40% in the 25–29 bracket (30 of 75) before increasing again to 44.4% for respondents aged 30–35 (20 of 45) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Participation by age cohort (n = 300)

Age Cohort (years)	Number Participated	Participation Rate (%)
15–19	18	24.0 %
20–24	52	49.5 %
25–29	30	40.0 %
30–35	20	44.4 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

The 20–24 age group demonstrated the highest engagement ($\chi^2(3, N = 300) = 23.14$, $p < .001$). This finding aligns with theories of youth agency that emphasise young adults' propensity for civic involvement when transitioning from education to employment (Berman, 2023).

Education: Participation in transitional justice activities showed a strong positive association with educational attainment ($\chi^2(4, N = 300) = 30.57$, $p < .001$). Only 13.3% of respondents with no formal education (4 of 30) reported participation, rising to 20% among those with primary schooling (9 of 45). Participation increased further to 40% for individuals who completed secondary education (48 of 120), 53.3% for holders of post-secondary diplomas (32 of 60) and peaked at 60% among those with a bachelor's degree or higher (27 of 45) as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Participation by education level (n = 300)

Education Level	Number Participated	Participation Rate (%)
No formal education	4	13.3 %
Primary education	9	20.0 %
Secondary education	48	40.0 %
Post-secondary diploma (OND/HND)	32	53.3 %
Bachelor's degree or higher	27	60.0 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

Higher educational attainment appears to facilitate awareness of and access to TJ forums, echoing evidence from Nigeria linking schooling to civic participation (Igboin, 2022).

Occupation: Engagement likewise varied significantly by occupation ($\chi^2(4, N = 300) = 28.65$, $p < .001$). Students exhibited the highest participation rate at 66.7% (40 of 60), followed by civil servants and traders, both at 40% (18 of 45 and 24 of 60, respectively). Other occupations, namely artisans, drivers and primary health workers, had a participation rate of 38.3% (23 of 60), while farmers reported the lowest involvement at 20% (15 of 75) as shown Table 6.

Table 6 Participation by occupation (n = 300)

Occupation	Number Participated	Participation Rate (%)
Student	40	66.7 %



Civil servant	18	40.0 %
Farmer	15	20.0 %
Trader	24	40.0 %
Other (artisan, etc.)	23	38.3 %

Source: Authors' Survey, 2025

Students displayed the highest participation, likely owing to greater exposure to information channels and flexible schedules. Farmers reported the lowest engagement, citing fieldwork obligations, a finding mirrored in KIIs (Participant 5, Personal Communication, 2025).

3.1.5. Role Patterns

Survey data reveal that youth in Gujba LGA occupy predominantly peripheral roles in TJ processes, with a minority acting in advisory or logistical capacities. This pattern of symbolic rather than substantive inclusion is sustained by traditional selection mechanisms, which favour students and educated young adults while marginalising those with limited schooling or agrarian livelihoods. The predominance of community reconciliation meetings as the principal forum suggests that authorities view youth presence largely as an attestation of legitimacy rather than as a source of policy input.

Qualitative interviews provide texture to these findings. One participant recounted being invited only to tally damaged properties, after which decisions were made exclusively by elders (KII Participant 1, Personal Communication, 2025). Another noted that his recommendation for an early warning system was implemented, yet he was not invited to subsequent planning sessions (KII Participant 3, Personal Communication, 2025). These accounts suggest that while youth contributions can catalyse practical measures, prevailing power dynamics prevent sustained engagement.

The demographic analysis indicates that civic capacity, proxied by education and occupational flexibility, enables deeper involvement. Conversely, subsistence labour and family-based selection norms curtail the participation of farmers, traders and young women. This structural exclusion undermines the normative premise of TJ as inclusive redress. For transitional justice interventions to move beyond ceremonial attendance, communication strategies must target under-represented demographics, circumvent gatekeeping and promote sustained involvement.

These results underscore the necessity of strategic communication and advocacy campaigning that specifically address the barriers identified here. Section 5 will outline a framework for such campaigns, detailing messaging objectives, audience segmentation and media channels capable of broadening youth roles from passive attendance to active co-creation of transitional justice processes.

3.2. Strategic Communication and Advocacy Framework

This section presents a communication strategy tailored to enhance youth engagement in transitional justice (TJ) forums in Gujba LGA. Drawing on empirical findings (refer back to Section 4) and established principles of strategic messaging, the framework comprises seven components namely communication objectives, stakeholder mapping, message development, channel selection, advocacy tactics, monitoring and evaluation, and integration with traditional authority structures.

3.2.1. Identifying Communication Objectives

Clear communication objectives are essential to guide a campaign's strategy and ensure measurable progress. The first objective is to increase awareness of TJ forums



among youth, since 65% of young residents reported either never hearing of these events or being notified too late (Survey, 2025). The campaign aims to raise this awareness level to at least 80% within six months by using accessible channels such as schools, community radio, mosques, and peer networks. This will ensure that more young people are informed early enough to participate.

The second objective is to reframe youth as active stakeholders rather than passive spectators. Currently, only 40% of attending youth speak or contribute meaningfully, while most are limited to symbolic or logistical roles (see Table 3). The campaign seeks to increase active participation to 60% by the end of the period through training, mentorship, and inclusive dialogue spaces. In this way, youth are not only present but empowered to shape reconciliation processes as contributors and decision-makers.

3.2.2. Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder mapping constitutes a crucial step in the development of effective communication campaigns, particularly within transitional justice (TJ) and community reconciliation contexts. The process allows for the segmentation of audiences based on their social roles, levels of influence, and accessibility, thereby ensuring that messages are not only targeted but also culturally resonant. In this study, four primary youth cohorts and four secondary stakeholder groups were identified as critical actors in shaping both message dissemination and reception. By distinguishing between these audiences, campaigns can strategically align content, format, and delivery mechanisms with the unique characteristics of each group, thus increasing the likelihood of engagement and long-term impact (Zerfass et al., 2018).

The primary audiences consist of young farmers, petty traders, students, and young women, each of whom represents distinct patterns of participation and information access. Young farmers, who comprise approximately 25% of respondents, demonstrate limited mobility during planting and harvest seasons, necessitating interventions that align with their agricultural calendar (Survey, 2025). Petty traders, accounting for 20% of participants, maintain a consistent presence in marketplaces and are accessible through their associations, which makes them pivotal conduits for daily interpersonal communication. Students, constituting another 20%, are clustered within two secondary schools and a polytechnic, making educational institutions a natural hub for peer-to-peer information flow. Meanwhile, young women, who make up 38% of female respondents, require communication formats that are sensitive to cultural norms and gender dynamics, ensuring inclusivity and avoiding unintended exclusionary effects.

The secondary audiences, although not direct recipients of campaign messaging, act as influential gatekeepers who determine access, legitimacy, and broader dissemination. Elders and traditional councils, for instance, exercise control over the selection process for participation in TJ forums, highlighting their authority in legitimising youth involvement (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Civil society organisations (CSOs), including the Taimako Community Development Initiative and the North East Youth Initiative Forum (NEYIF), facilitate community dialogues and provide structural platforms for sustained engagement. Local authorities, particularly officials operating within the LGA secretariat, hold the power to sanction and legitimise official events, thereby shaping the formal boundaries of participation. Religious leaders, such as imams and mosque committees, play a pivotal role in influencing community norms, given their moral authority and capacity to mobilise collective opinion. Collectively, these groups ensure that campaign messaging gains credibility, traction, and circulation across different layers of society.



By systematically mapping both primary and secondary stakeholders, communication strategies are able to integrate the dual objectives of direct engagement with youth and indirect endorsement through community gatekeepers. This dual-layered approach strengthens the campaign's capacity to resonate across social strata, ensures that messaging reaches otherwise inaccessible groups, and aligns with established channels of legitimacy. Moreover, it underscores the importance of adopting culturally contextualised strategies in environments where authority and influence are embedded in traditional, religious, and administrative structures. As Dearing (2021) emphasises in the diffusion of innovations theory, the success of communication campaigns depends not merely on the content of messages but on the social architecture through which they are transmitted. Stakeholder mapping, therefore, is not only an operational tool but also a strategic framework for ensuring sustainable and inclusive engagement.

3.2.3. Message Development

Message development plays a central role in shaping how campaigns are received, interpreted, and acted upon by their intended audiences. In the context of Gujba LGA, the effectiveness of communication depends on whether messages resonate with local cultural norms and reflect the lived realities of youth. Two core themes have been designed to address this need, "Your Voice Matters in Justice" and the use of culturally resonant metaphors. The first theme highlights the importance of youth agency, stressing that personal narratives are essential contributions to communal redress. Evidence from a pilot survey indicates that 72% of youth found this tagline to make transitional justice (TJ) feel more relevant to their lives (Pilot Survey, 2024). By framing justice as inclusive and participatory, the message encourages young people to move beyond passive observation toward active involvement in decision-making processes.

Equally important is the use of culturally grounded metaphors, which enhance emotional engagement and memorability. An illustrative example is the Hausa phrase "Matasa sune kashin bayan al'umma" meaning "the youth are the backbone of society." Such metaphors are not only linguistically familiar but also symbolically powerful, bridging the abstract notion of justice with everyday community values (Entman, 1993). Focus group discussions (three groups, $n = 24$) confirmed that both the tagline and the metaphorical framing were intelligible and motivating across diverse youth subgroups, including gender and occupational categories (FGDs, 2024). These findings underscore that messages grounded in cultural idioms are more likely to be retained, repeated, and acted upon, thereby strengthening the overall impact of the campaign.

3.2.4. Channel Selection and Media Mix

Channel selection and media mix are critical in ensuring that campaign messages reach diverse segments of the youth population while also accommodating differences in literacy, language, and media access. A multimodal strategy allows for the integration of both traditional and digital platforms, thereby maximising reach and reinforcing key messages through multiple touchpoints. In Gujba LGA, four specific channels have been prioritised to reflect audience preferences and communication patterns: radio programming, town crier announcements combined with poster campaigns, digital networks through WhatsApp and SMS, and youth-led video testimonies. Together, these channels create a layered communication ecosystem that bridges generational divides and fosters cultural resonance (Botan, 2021).



Radio remains one of the most effective mass communication tools in the region, with two 30-minute weekly slots on the FM service of Yobe Broadcasting Corporation (YBC) scheduled at 17:00 hours to coincide with the return of traders and youth. Audience research shows that 58% of listeners tune in during this period, making it a strategically chosen slot (Falkheimer & Heide, 2022). Complementing this, daily morning town crier announcements and poster displays in market squares and other high-traffic areas ensure that information reaches individuals who rely on oral communication or public noticeboards. Importantly, posters were co-designed with youth artists, embedding cultural relevance and visual familiarity into campaign materials.

Digital communication channels expand the campaign's reach to younger, more connected audiences. WhatsApp groups, with memberships of over 1,200 students and 850 traders, provide organic peer-to-peer dissemination of information. Additionally, SMS blasts targeting young farmers deliver concise schedules of transitional justice events, with delivery reports indicating a 95% successful receipt rate. These platforms bridge gaps created by mobility limitations and agricultural cycles, ensuring that rural populations remain informed.

Youth-led video testimonies provide a powerful medium for storytelling and peer validation. Eight short vignettes, each two to three minutes in length, were produced by local youth videographers and feature personal narratives of participation in TJ processes. These videos are screened at community centres and circulated via WhatsApp, while also being broadcast on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Yobe State Television (YTV) in Damaturu. By amplifying authentic youth voices across multiple platforms, the campaign reinforces both credibility and relatability. Collectively, this media mix not only enhances message penetration but also fosters inclusivity by addressing varied literacy levels, language preferences, and viewing habits, thereby ensuring that no segment of the youth population is left behind.

3.2.5. *Advocacy Campaign Tactics*

The advocacy campaign in Gujba LGA uses participatory tactics to move youth from passive awareness to active engagement in transitional justice (TJ). Community theatre performances, staged in three wards with 450 youth attending, provided relatable enactments of TJ forums followed by open discussions. In parallel, 30 youth ambassadors, balanced by gender and ward, were trained to run peer workshops, each reaching around 40 peers in two months. These approaches combined cultural relevance with peer trust, making TJ concepts more accessible and empowering.

Media and digital tools added further layers of participation (Bowe et al., 2020). Monthly radio call-in shows, moderated by youth facilitators, gave listeners a chance to question TJ officials, resulting in seven adopted policy changes from community proposals. Interactive SMS quizzes, sent to 1,500 subscribers with small incentives, maintained a steady 35% participation rate after four weeks. Together, these tactics blended performance, peer education, dialogue, and gamification, creating inclusive and engaging spaces where young people could learn, contribute, and shape justice processes.

3.2.6. *Monitoring and Evaluation*

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure that campaign activities achieve their intended outcomes while remaining responsive to community needs. In Gujba LGA, a mixed-method framework was applied, combining quantitative performance indicators with qualitative feedback mechanisms. Quantitative measures tracked tangible outcomes



such as attendance and message retention. For instance, youth participation in transitional justice (TJ) events increased from 40% to 53% within six months, moving steadily toward the 60% target set for 12 months. Message recall surveys showed that 68% of respondents could remember core messages without prompting, while social media analytics recorded 4,200 total views and 380 direct shares of youth-led video testimonies across WhatsApp and Facebook. These metrics provide concrete evidence of message penetration and engagement across both offline and online platforms (Waisbord, 2018).

To complement these figures, qualitative feedback loops were designed to capture community perspectives and refine campaign strategies. Suggestion boxes placed in four community centres collected 212 entries, highlighting both strengths and areas needing improvement. Meanwhile, post-event focus group discussions in each ward revealed important themes, such as requests for more women-only sessions and clearer event scheduling. These insights were systematically reviewed during regular meetings with stakeholder representatives, ensuring that the campaign evolved iteratively and inclusively (Doughty, 2017). By integrating both numerical indicators and lived experiences, the monitoring system not only measured effectiveness but also fostered a culture of responsiveness, adaptability, and shared ownership.

3.2.7. Integration with Traditional Structures

Integration with traditional structures is vital for ensuring that youth-focused communication campaigns achieve long-term sustainability and legitimacy within Gujba LGA. Customary authorities, particularly elders and chiefs, continue to serve as central figures in local governance and social life, meaning that new communication initiatives must align with, rather than bypass, these established frameworks. To this end, the campaign strategically linked modern media channels with traditional forums, creating points of continuity that foster trust and institutional acceptance. Weekly radio summaries, for example, were scheduled immediately before district council meetings, enabling elders to be briefed on youth perspectives in advance. This linkage ensured that concerns raised by younger generations were positioned within existing decision-making processes, reinforcing dialogue rather than creating parallel structures.

Further integration was achieved through visible endorsements and joint participation. In call-in radio shows, elders co-moderated alongside youth facilitators, a gesture that not only validated the role of young voices but also signalled intergenerational collaboration. Such moments of shared authority culminated in elders publicly inviting youth to participate in upcoming TJ forums, thereby granting institutional legitimacy to their presence. The campaign also capitalised on cultural events, incorporating moderated TJ dialogues into the annual Durbar festival. Here, girls' school prefects and traditional drummers co-facilitated brief sessions, leading to 85% awareness among attendees (Festival Survey, 2025). By embedding TJ messages in widely celebrated cultural traditions, the campaign ensured visibility and resonance across community lines. This integration demonstrates that anchoring new practices within traditional socio-political structures enhances both credibility and sustainability, echoing Ingelaere's (2020) argument that legitimacy in transitional contexts depends on culturally embedded authority.

3.3. Discussion



This discussion integrates the empirical findings on youth participation in transitional justice (TJ) forums in Gujba LGA with insights from strategic communication theory. The evidence reveals that while youth demonstrate some presence in reconciliation meetings, their attendance and level of contribution remain limited. Only 60% of youth reported attending community meetings, and a mere 25% engaged in policy workshops, with very few participating in multiple events. These gaps are linked to deficiencies in timely and relevant communication, which leave many young people either unaware of TJ activities or perceiving them as irrelevant. Strategic communication theory underscores the importance of clear, culturally appropriate, and multi-channel messaging in addressing such gaps (Fromm, 1937; Loorbach et al., 2020). Pilot initiatives, such as WhatsApp alerts and Hausa radio broadcasts, have already demonstrated measurable improvements in youth attendance, suggesting that information accessibility is a decisive factor in engagement.

Cultural and gender barriers further restrict youth participation, particularly among young women. Female youth attendance stood at only 35%, compared with 43% for their male counterparts. Norms rooted in religious and cultural expectations often require women to seek permission to attend public events, limiting their freedom to participate. Qualitative data illustrate that women feel more comfortable in women-only spaces facilitated by female mediators, where domestic responsibilities and cultural sensitivities are better understood. Campaigns that include women-focused sessions, culturally sensitive radio bulletins, and poster campaigns portraying women as active contributors can counter prevailing stereotypes. Moreover, interactive tools such as Facebook polls enable women to express preferences regarding event timing and venues, aligning participation opportunities with their daily routines. Such gender-sensitive strategies reflect broader principles of conflict-sensitive communication that advocate inclusivity and cultural competence (Botan, 2021).

The findings also highlight the potential for youth to shift from symbolic to substantive roles in TJ processes. At present, youth involvement is often limited to storytelling or logistical support, yet data indicate that 77% of respondents believe youth engagement strengthens trust between communities and authorities. When young people are given advisory roles, they provide valuable perspectives that enrich dialogue and policy decisions. For instance, radio call-in shows allowed youth to question officials and propose adjustments to reparations criteria, leading to tangible policy changes and higher beneficiary satisfaction. Similarly, peer education workshops cultivated ownership among students, reinforcing collective agency. These practices align with social identity theory, which stresses that peer influence shapes attitudes and participation. Substantive youth involvement not only improves the legitimacy of TJ forums but also enables advocacy for youth-oriented reparations, such as scholarships and vocational training, addressing the structural challenges of “waithood” (Honwana, 2014).

Despite these promising outcomes, several limitations must be acknowledged. Financial constraints remain a critical barrier, as communication activities such as radio airtime and video production require steady funding, yet local authorities dedicate only 0.5% of their annual budget to TJ efforts. Risks of elite co-option also threaten credibility, as traditional leaders have in some cases replaced youth representatives with their own appointees, eroding trust. Furthermore, inconsistencies in language use across platforms have caused confusion among audiences, underscoring the need for harmonised messaging strategies. Finally, the contextual specificity of Gujba LGA, characterised by rural, agrarian livelihoods and strong traditional governance, limits the generalisability of



findings. Replication in other regions with different demographic and socio-political dynamics, such as Geidam or Tarmuwa, will require further adaptation and comparative research (Gready & Robins, 2017).

The integration of empirical findings with communication theory underscores that youth engagement in TJ processes hinges on accessible, culturally resonant, and inclusive communication strategies. While significant challenges remain, the evidence shows that strategic use of multiple channels, coupled with sensitivity to gender and cultural norms, can expand both the breadth and depth of youth participation. Moreover, when young people are empowered to move beyond symbolic roles, their contributions foster trust, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and enhance the responsiveness of justice mechanisms. Addressing funding gaps, safeguarding against elite capture, and harmonising content delivery will be essential for sustaining these gains. Ultimately, this approach positions youth not as passive bystanders but as active agents in shaping reconciliation and long-term peacebuilding in Gujba LGA.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the participation of youth in transitional justice (TJ) forums in Gujba LGA and found their involvement to be both limited and uneven. Survey data revealed that 40% of youth had ever attended a TJ event, with participation concentrated in community reconciliation meetings (60%), truth-telling forums (45%), and reparations programs (40%). Yet, nearly half of these participants attended only once (46.7%), and fewer than one in five (19.2%) sustained engagement across multiple sessions. Demographic patterns showed higher participation among those aged 20–24, students, and individuals with post-secondary education.

Findings also pointed to the critical role of communication strategies. Traditional channels, such as town criers and elder networks, often failed to reach young people engaged in farming or petty trading. In contrast, pilot communication efforts particularly radio segments and WhatsApp networking, significantly improved awareness and attendance. Based on these insights, the study recommends the establishment of youth communication units within TJ structures, accompanied by secured annual budgets of NGN 7 million (approximately US \$15,000) to sustain multi-channel advocacy. Practical guidelines further stress participatory message design, diversified media use, and youth-focused capacity building to foster meaningful and continuous engagement.

Beyond practice, this study contributes theoretically by extending participatory communication and TJ frameworks to rural African settings. It demonstrates how combining diffusion of innovations theory with restorative justice principles can reframe youth from passive attendees into active contributors. Future research should assess the longitudinal impacts of communication campaigns on sustained youth participation and compare outcomes in neighboring LGAs, such as Geidam and Tarmuwa. Such work will strengthen the generalizability of this framework and advance communication-centered approaches to transitional justice in northeast Nigeria.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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