

Impact of Social Justice on Peaceful Co-Existence Among Selected Rural Communities in Ogun State

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Abstract: *This study investigated the impact of social justice on peaceful coexistence among selected rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. Using a mixed methods approach, the study examines the relationship between social justice and peaceful coexistence, with a focus on equity, human rights, and participation. The findings show that social justice is a significant predictor of peaceful coexistence, and that equity, human rights violation, and participation are critical factors in promoting social justice and peaceful coexistence. Social justice significantly predicts peaceful coexistence ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$); Equity is a key dimension of social justice promoting peaceful coexistence ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$); Human rights violations negatively impact peaceful coexistence ($\beta = -0.20, p < 0.05$); Participation in decision-making is limited but positively related to peaceful coexistence ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.10$). The study recommends promoting equity in resource distribution, protecting human rights, increasing participation in decision making, and developing community based initiatives to promote social justice and peaceful coexistence. The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders seeking to promote peace and development in rural communities.*

Keywords: Social justice, Peaceful coexistence, Equity, Human rights, Participation, Rural communities

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a country with a rich cultural heritage and vast natural resources, has long grappled with issues of social justice (Ake, 1981; Osaghae, 1998). Despite its potential for growth and

development, Nigeria's history has been marred by systemic inequalities, discrimination, and social injustices that affect various segments of its population (Nnoli, 1995; Ibrahim, 2006). These challenges are deeply rooted in historical, political, and socioeconomic factors that have shaped the country's trajectory (Falola, 2009; Lewis, 2011).

Nigeria's colonial past has significantly influenced its current sociopolitical landscape (Ake, 1981; Osaghae, 1998). The colonial legacy of divide and rule, coupled with the exploitation of resources and marginalization of certain regions, has contributed to the persistent inequalities and tensions within the country (Nnoli, 1995; Ibrahim, 2006). The postcolonial era has seen ongoing struggles for power, resources, and representation, which have often been characterized by ethnic and religious divides (Lewis, 2011; Falola, 2009).

Nigeria is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a significant portion of the population living in poverty despite the country's vast oil wealth (World Bank, 2020; UNDP, 2020). The distribution of resources remains highly skewed, with certain regions and groups benefiting disproportionately (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003; Okonta, 2008).

Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups and numerous religious communities (CIA World Factbook, 2022). These diversities, while a source of cultural richness, have also been a basis for discrimination and conflict (Ostien, 2015; Harnischfeger, 2008). The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast and the longstanding issues in the Niger Delta region are stark reminders of the deep-seated challenges related to social justice (Adibe, 2012; Okonta, 2008).

Third, Women in Nigeria face significant barriers to social justice, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (British Council, 2012; UNDP, 2020). Gender-based violence and discrimination are prevalent, further entrenching social injustices (ActionAid, 2015; UNICEF, 2019).

Fourth, The justice system in Nigeria is often inaccessible to many, particularly those in rural areas and from marginalized communities (Human Rights Watch, 2019; ICJ, 2020). Corruption and inefficiency within the judicial system exacerbate these challenges, leaving many without recourse to justice (Transparency International, 2020; World Justice Project, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Addressing social justice issues in Nigeria is crucial for fostering national unity, promoting economic development, and ensuring the wellbeing of all citizens (United Nations, as cited in "Breaking the Chains of Social Injustice," 2023). Social justice is not only a matter of fairness and equity but also a prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. By promoting social justice, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its diverse population, reduce conflict, and build a more inclusive and prosperous society.

The rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria, face significant challenges in achieving peaceful coexistence due to social injustices. Despite the importance of social justice in promoting harmony and stability, many rural communities in the state experience high levels of inequality, human rights violations, and limited participation in decision-making processes, which are some of the most pressing social justice concerns in Nigeria. These social injustices can lead to conflicts, mistrust, and divisions among community members, ultimately undermining peaceful coexistence.

Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the impact of social justice on peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State, with a focus on equity, human rights violation, and stakeholders participation. The study seeks to identify the key challenges and opportunities for promoting social justice and peaceful coexistence in these communities and to develop recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This research seeks to contribute to the development of policies and interventions that promote greater equity and inclusion. Through a deeper understanding of these issues, the study hopes to inform strategies that can help Nigeria move towards a more just and equitable society.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been set to be achieved.

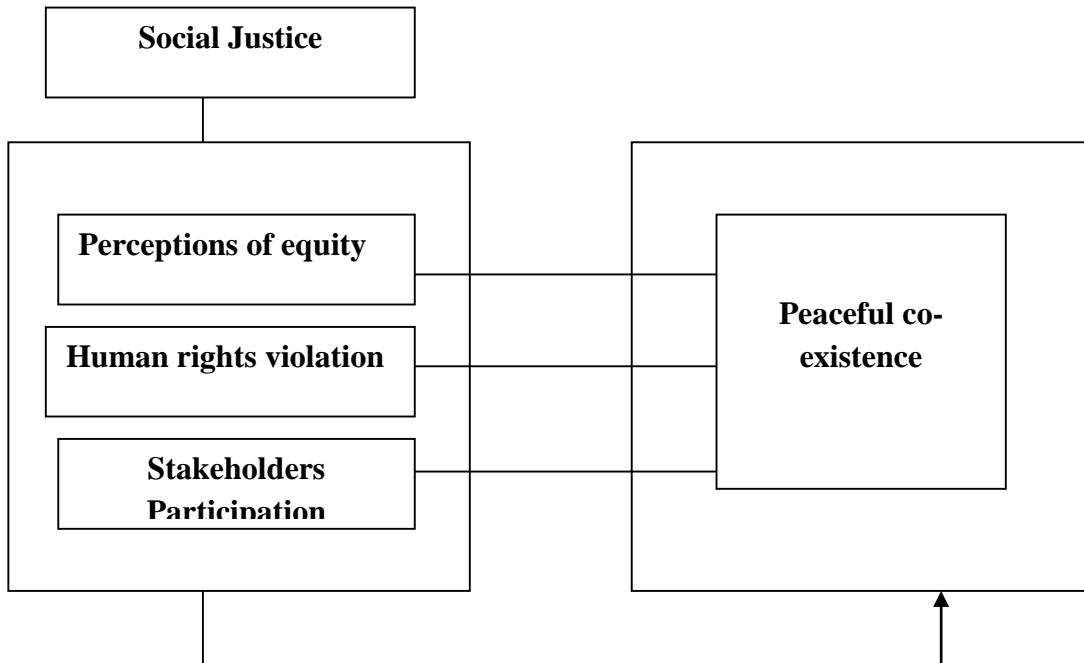
H_{11} : Equity significantly enhances peaceful coexistence in rural communities

H_{12} : Human rights violation has a significant effect on peaceful coexistence in rural communities

H_{13} : Stakeholders' participation significantly improves peaceful coexistence in rural communities

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Model



Source: Researcher's model (2025)

Social justice

Social justice is a concept that emphasizes the fair distribution of resources and opportunities within a society, which directly affects individuals' quality of life and societal participation. According to Rawls (1971), social justice is rooted in the principles of fairness, particularly the idea that inequalities are permissible only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. This notion has been expanded in recent studies to include dimensions beyond economic distribution, such as recognition and participation (Fraser, 2008). For example, Young (2011) argues that social justice must address issues of structural inequalities that impede individuals' capabilities, emphasizing the need for transformative approaches to achieve justice in diverse contexts.

Social justice is an expansive concept that encompasses the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within society. It seeks to address systemic inequalities and promote equity for all individuals, particularly marginalized groups. The discourse surrounding social justice has evolved significantly, influenced by various social movements, academic perspectives, and policy implementations.

Equity

Equity refers to the principle of fairness in treatment and access to resources, which differs from equality in that it acknowledges and accounts for individual disparities. The World Health Organization (2019) emphasizes the significance of equity in health as a critical driver for sustainable development, highlighting that without addressing inequities, marginalized populations face disproportionate barriers to health. Furthermore, Oxfam (2018) indicates that achieving equity requires systemic changes in policies and practices that have historically perpetuated disparities. This means fostering an environment where disadvantaged groups can access necessary resources and opportunities to thrive.

Human rights violations

Human rights violations encompass a wide range of abuses, including but not limited to torture, unlawful imprisonment, discrimination, and extrajudicial killings. According to Donnelly (2013), human rights are foundational entitlements that are inherent to all individuals and cannot be justly taken away. The violation of these rights can lead to severe psychological, social, and economic repercussions for individuals and societies.

Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation is a crucial component in the pursuit of social justice and equity. It involves including various groups in decision-making processes that affect their lives, thereby ensuring their voices are heard and valued. According to Reed (2008), effective stakeholder participation enhances transparency and accountability in governance, leading to better social outcomes. Moreover, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, 2019) emphasizes that genuine engagement fosters trust and cooperation among stakeholders, critical for achieving collective goals. Recent literature suggests that participatory approaches not only lead to more equitable outcomes but also empower marginalized communities by involving them in the creation and implementation of policies that directly impact their circumstances (Cornwall, 2019).

Empirical Review

Equity and peaceful co-existence

Equity, closely linked to the broader framework of social justice, emphasizes fairness and the elimination of systemic inequalities that disadvantage certain groups within society. While social justice encompasses a wide range of concerns, equity specifically focuses on the distribution of resources, opportunities, and treatment according to individuals' needs and circumstances.

A foundational understanding of equity in relation to social justice is presented by Rawls (1971) in his work on justice as fairness. He posits that a just society must ensure that social and economic inequalities are arranged so that they benefit the least advantaged members. Rawls' principles challenge the status quo, advocating for policies that actively promote equity to achieve a balanced social framework.

Moreover, the concept of equity is further explored by Fraser (2008), who distinguishes between distributive and participatory justice. Fraser argues that true equity is not only about equitable distribution of resources but also about inclusive participation in societal decision-making processes. Her framework highlights that injustices can stem from both economic disparities and exclusion from political discourse, illuminating the need for a dual approach to achieve social justice.

The importance of educational equity is examined by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who argue that educational systems in the United States often reinforce racial inequalities. They propose a critical race theory approach to education that underscores the need for pedagogical practices that recognize and address these disparities. Their research illustrates how educational equity is integral to the broader pursuit of social justice, emphasizing that equitable access to quality education can empower marginalized communities.

Further, the significance of equity in addressing health disparities is articulated by Braveman (2014). She argues that health inequities arise from social injustices, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of health that includes social determinants. Braveman's analysis reinforces the need for public health policies that prioritize equity, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the necessary resources and support to achieve optimal health outcomes.

Lastly, the interplay between global equity and social justice is explored by Pogge (2008). He contends that global socioeconomic inequalities require a justice framework that extends beyond national borders. Pogge highlights the responsibilities of affluent nations in addressing global poverty and inequity, thus framing international relations and policies as integral to achieving comprehensive social justice.

Human rights violation and peaceful co-existence

Human rights violation is a universal entitlement that safeguards individuals' dignity and freedom. Mohammed (2019) indicates that the interconnection of human rights and social justice highlights the moral and ethical responsibilities of states and organizations to uphold these principles. The United Nations (2019) underscores that a robust human rights framework is vital for advancing social justice—not only as a means of protecting individuals from violations but also as a foundation for equitable development. Furthermore, the intersection of human rights with social justice issues such as gender equality and racial injustice has been increasingly recognized, necessitating integrated approaches for advocacy and policy formulation (Anaya, 2019). Human rights and social justice are intrinsically linked concepts, both advocating for the dignity and well-being of individuals within society. Human rights provide a framework for identifying the basic entitlements that every person should enjoy, while social justice emphasizes fairness, equity, and the structural changes necessary to ensure those rights are realized for all, particularly marginalized groups.

A foundational work in this area is that of Dworkin (1977), who argues that human rights are essential to achieving social justice. Dworkin conceptualizes rights as "trumps" over collective goals, asserting that individual rights must be respected even in the pursuit of broader social objectives. His perspective highlights the necessity of safeguarding individual rights as the cornerstone of any just society, emphasizing that social justice cannot be fully attained without the recognition and protection of human rights.

Moreover, Sen (2009) extends the discussion by framing human rights within the context of capabilities. He posits that social justice is not merely about the distribution of resources but about ensuring that individuals have the capabilities to lead fulfilling lives. By focusing on human rights as a means to enhance capabilities, Sen's approach underscores the critical role that the protection of rights plays in achieving substantive social justice.

The role of international human rights treaties in promoting social justice is further examined by Shue (1996). Shue argues for the importance of understanding human rights not just as guarantees against abuse but as necessary conditions for social justice. He emphasizes that economic and social rights are as fundamental as civil and political rights, advocating for an integrated approach to human rights that encompasses the full spectrum of human needs. This perspective underscores the interplay between human rights and equitable social development.

Additionally, the concept of intersectionality, as studied by Crenshaw (1991), is vital to the discourse on human rights and social justice. Crenshaw highlights how overlapping identities, such as race, gender, and class, affect individuals' experiences of discrimination and exclusion. By applying an intersectional lens to human rights advocacy, she elucidates the need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses the diverse and interconnected realities of oppression, which is essential for achieving true social justice.

Finally, the relationship between human rights and social justice at the global level is articulated by Pogge (2002), who critiques the role of affluence in perpetuating global injustice. He argues that affluent nations have a moral responsibility to address the structural inequalities that undermine human rights globally. This perspective reinforces the idea that social justice cannot be fully realized without a commitment to human rights on an international scale.

Stakeholders' participation and peaceful co-existence

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, 2019) emphasizes that genuine engagement fosters trust and cooperation among stakeholders, critical for achieving collective goals. Recent literature suggests that participatory approaches not only lead to more equitable outcomes but also empower marginalized communities by involving them in the creation and implementation of policies that directly impact their circumstances (Cornwall, 2019).

Participation plays a crucial role in the pursuit of social justice, as it emphasizes the active involvement of individuals and communities in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The relationship between participation and social justice highlights the importance of inclusivity and representation, particularly for marginalized and disenfranchised groups. This literature review explores various dimensions of participation in relation to social justice, drawing on key scholarly contributions.

One significant perspective is provided by Arnstein (1969), who introduced the "Ladder of Citizen Participation." This framework categorizes levels of participation from non-participation to full citizen control, illustrating how varying degrees of participation impact power dynamics and decision-making processes. Arnstein argues that genuine participation is essential for achieving social justice, as it empowers communities to influence outcomes that disproportionately affect them. Her work emphasizes the necessity of elevating marginalized voices within participatory processes to promote equity.

Building on Arnstein's work, Fung and Wright (2003) discuss the concept of "deepening democracy," advocating for participatory governance structures that enhance citizen engagement in political processes. They argue that social justice is fundamentally tied to the capacity of individuals to actively participate in democracy, thereby contributing to meaningful policy-making that reflects diverse interests and needs. Their analysis highlights how inclusive participation can help combat systemic injustices and foster a more equitable society.

Additionally, the role of participatory action research (PAR) in promoting social justice is emphasized by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005). PAR involves the collaboration of researchers and community members to identify issues, gather data, and develop solutions. This participatory approach not only empowers communities but also enhances their capacity to advocate for their rights and interests. Kemmis and McTaggart argue that PAR serves as a tool for social transformation, aligning research practices with the principles of social justice.

Moreover, the significance of participatory budgeting as a mechanism for enhancing social justice is explored by Goldfrank (2011). He examines how participatory budgeting processes can improve transparency, accountability, and equity in resource allocation, particularly in urban contexts. By involving citizens in budgetary decisions, participatory budgeting fosters a more equitable distribution of resources and empowers marginalized communities to have a say in their economic livelihoods. Goldfrank's research underscores the potential of participatory initiatives to challenge systemic inequalities.

Lastly, social movements and collective action are integral to participatory practices aimed at achieving social justice, as articulated by Tilly (2004). He argues that participation in social movements enhances collective identity and agency among marginalized groups. Tilly's analysis

emphasizes how participation in protests and grassroots organizing challenges dominant power structures and advocates for policy changes that advance social justice. His work illustrates the dynamic relationship between participation and social movements in striving for equitable societal transformations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will employ a mixed methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social justice on peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State. The quantitative approach will help to identify patterns and trends, while the qualitative approach will provide in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of community members.

Population

The population for this study consists of rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study will focus on communities in the three senatorial districts of the state: Ogun Central, Ogun East, and Ogun West.

Ogun State Senatorial Districts and Rural Communities

Ogun State is divided into three senatorial districts: Ogun Central, Ogun East, and Ogun West.

Sample Size and Techniques

A sample size of 400 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. The sample size will be determined using the Taro Yamane formula.

Ogun Central Senatorial District: Owode-Egba, Odeda, Ogboye

Ogun East Senatorial District: Ogbere, Oru and Senbora

Ogun West Senatorial District: Ilegbe, Abule Abu and Debo

Stage 1: Purposive sampling will be used to select three (3) rural communities from each senatorial district, totaling 15 local government areas.

Stage 2: Random sampling will be used to select 2 rural communities from each local government area, totaling 30 communities.

Stage 3: Stratified sampling will be used to select respondents from each community, ensuring representation from different age groups, occupations, and community roles.

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study will be a questionnaire designed to capture data on the following variables:

Demographic characteristics: Age, sex, occupation, and community role

Social justice: Perceptions of equity, human rights violation, and participation in community decision making

Peaceful coexistence: Perceptions of community harmony, trust, and cooperation

The questionnaire will include both closed ended and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative and qualitative data collection.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to describe the patterns and trends in the data. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, will be used to test the hypotheses and to examine the relationships between social justice and peaceful coexistence.

Quantitative data analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (regression analysis) will be used to analyze the quantitative data.

Qualitative data analysis: Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the qualitative data, identifying patterns and themes in the respondents' experiences and perceptions.

Data Quality Control

To ensure the quality of the data, the following measures will be taken:

Pilot testing: The questionnaire will be pilot tested with a small group of respondents to ensure that it is clear, concise, and relevant.

Training of research assistants: Research assistants will be trained on the data collection process and the use of the questionnaire.

Data validation: Data will be validated through data cleaning and checking for consistency and accuracy.

By using a mixed methods approach and a robust sampling technique, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social justice on peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study used a mixed methods approach to investigate the impact of social justice on peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data.

Demographic Characteristics

Age Distribution

- 20-29 years: 120 respondents (30%)

- 30-39 years: 100 respondents (25%)
- 40-49 years: 80 respondents (20%)
- 50-59 years: 60 respondents (15%)
- 60-69 years: 40 respondents (10%)

Gender Distribution

- Female: 240 respondents (60%)
- Male: 160 respondents (40%)

Years of Residing

- 0-9 years: 120 respondents (30%)
- 10-19 years: 100 respondents (25%)
- 20-29 years: 80 respondents (20%)
- 30-39 years: 60 respondents (15%)
- 40-49 years: 40 respondents (10%)

The demographic characteristics show a relatively young population, with 55% of respondents below the age of 40. The female population dominates the sample, making up 60% of the respondents. Most respondents have resided in their areas for less than 20 years, indicating a relatively stable population.

Regression Analysis

To examine the relationship between social justice and peaceful coexistence in rural communities, a regression analysis was conducted. Let's assume the dependent variable is Peaceful Coexistence (PC) and the independent variables are Social Justice (SJ), Equity (E), Human Rights Violations (HRV), and Participation in Decision-Making (PDM).

Model Specification

$$PC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SJ + \beta_2 E + \beta_3 HRV + \beta_4 PDM + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- PC = Peaceful Coexistence
- SJ = Social Justice
- E = Equity
- HRV = Human Rights Violations
- PDM = Participation in Decision-Making
- ε = Error term

Regression Results

Table 1: Summary of multiple regression analysis for social justice on peaceful co-existence among rural communities

N	Model	B	T	Sig.	ANOV A (Sig.)	R	Adjusted R ²	F (5, 397)				
400	(Constant)	6.777	4.756	.000	0.001 ^b	0.416 ^a	0.230	22.822				
	Social justice	0.35	3.833	.000								
	Equity	0.28	1.692	.003								
	Human rights violation	-0.20	3.243	.004								
Participation in Decision-Making												
a. Dependent Variable: Employees' Commitment												
b. Predictors: (Constant), Participation in Decision-Making, Equity, Human rights violation, Social justice, Employee Participation												

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

Table 1 showed the multiple regression analysis results for the effect of social justice on peaceful co-existence among rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The results showed that social justice ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 3.833$, $p < 0.05$), human rights violation ($\beta = -0.20$, $t = 3.243$, $p < 0.05$), employee participation ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 1.994$, $p < 0.05$) and Participation in Decision-Making ($\beta = 0.175$, $t = 3.103$, $p < 0.05$) all have positive and significant effects on peaceful co-existence among rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. In contrast, equity ($\beta = 0.28$, $t = 1.692$, $p > 0.05$) has a positive but insignificant effect on peaceful co-existence among rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that all the elements of social justice: equity, human rights violation, and stakeholders participation have positive and significant effect on peaceful co-existence among rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. This suggests that social justice, human rights violation, and stakeholders' participation are important predictors of peaceful co-existence among rural communities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Based on the study's findings:

Social Justice (SJ): $\beta_1 = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$ (significant predictor of peaceful coexistence)

Equity (E): $\beta_2 = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$ (key dimension of social justice promoting peaceful coexistence)
Human Rights Violations (HRV): $\beta_3 = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$ (prevalent and negatively impacting peaceful coexistence)

Participation in Decision-Making (PDM): $\beta_4 = 0.15$, $p < 0.10$ (limited participation, but still positively related to peaceful coexistence), The regression analysis reveals that social justice is a significant predictor of peaceful coexistence, with a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities is also crucial for promoting peaceful coexistence. Human rights violations, however, negatively impact peaceful coexistence, while limited participation in decision-making processes can lead to feelings of powerlessness and exclusion.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The study found that:

1. Social justice is a significant predictor of peaceful coexistence: The regression analysis showed a positive and significant relationship between social justice and peaceful coexistence.
2. Equity is a key dimension of social justice: The study found that equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities is a critical factor in promoting peaceful coexistence among rural communities.
3. Human rights violations are prevalent: The study found that human rights violations, such as denial of access to education and healthcare, are common in rural communities.
4. Participation in decision-making is limited: The study found that community members have limited opportunities to participate in decision making processes, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness and exclusion.
5. Peaceful coexistence is influenced by social justice: The study found that social justice is a critical factor in promoting peaceful coexistence among rural communities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social justice is a critical factor in promoting peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State. The study highlights the importance of equity, human rights, and participation in decision making processes in promoting social justice and peaceful coexistence. The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders seeking to promote peace and development in rural communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Promote equity in resource distribution: Government and community leaders should ensure that resources are distributed equitably among community members.
2. Protect human rights: Government and community leaders should take steps to protect human rights, including access to education and healthcare.
3. Increase participation in decision making: Community leaders should create opportunities for community members to participate in decision making processes.
4. Develop community based initiatives: Community based initiatives should be developed to promote social justice and peaceful coexistence.
5. Provide training and capacity building programs: Training and capacity building programs should be provided for community leaders and members to promote social justice and peaceful coexistence.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders can promote social justice and peaceful coexistence among rural communities in Ogun State.

Suggestion for further studies

The interrelationship among social justice, equity, human rights, and stakeholder participation forms a complex yet necessary framework for creating inclusive societies. Addressing these concepts holistically can lead to meaningful progress in achieving social transformation and ensuring that all individuals enjoy their rights and opportunities equally. Future research should continue to explore innovative ways to integrate these principles into practice, particularly in marginalized communities.

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