

**FAMILY DISINTEGRATION AND THE EROSION OF SOCIAL COHESION IN NIGERIA:  
THE LOSS OF INTERGENERATIONAL GLUE AND A FRAMEWORK FOR REBUILDING  
FAMILY SYSTEMS**

**Barrister Adebayo Akinade, dfisn**

Deputy President & Chief Executive,  
Institute of Security Nigeria  
Email: bayoakinade@yahoo.co.uk

**Abstract**

Contemporary Nigerian families exhibit increasing fragmentation, conflict over inheritance, and loss of intergenerational transmission of values. This paper analyzes the phenomenon through the lens of social cohesion theory, family systems theory, and conflict-sensitive community development. Drawing on the observation that the death of elders without intentional succession has eroded the role of social glue, the study argues that family disintegration is not primarily a failure of love but a failure of institutionalized succession in the role of unity maintenance. Using qualitative analysis of contemporary Nigerian family dynamics and drawing on published works by Barrister Adebayo Akinade on community policing, conflict prevention, social and human security, and communication in law enforcement, the paper proposes a framework for intentional succession, rhythm-building, and value transmission to restore family cohesion. The framework is applicable to families, traditional institutions, religious bodies, and civil society organizations seeking to reverse the trend of familial atomization.

**Keywords:** Family Disintegration, Social Cohesion, Intergenerational Transmission, Conflict Prevention, Community Resilience, Nigeria

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The Nigerian family system has historically functioned as the primary unit of socialization, conflict resolution, economic cooperation, and cultural transmission. The extended family, anchored by elders, maintained cohesion through defined roles, rituals, and mechanisms for dispute resolution. In the last three decades, urbanization, migration, digital communication, and mortality of elder generations have disrupted these structures. The result is visible in the absence of the grandmother who settled quarrels, the uncle who remembered birthdays, and the father whose authority ended disputes.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Family disintegration manifests as protracted inheritance disputes, breakdown of communication between siblings and cousins, loss of cultural identity among youth, and inability to mobilize collective action for family welfare. The underlying cause is not the absence of love but the absence of succession in the role of social glue. When elders die without intentional transfer of their function, families lack the mechanisms to maintain unity.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To analyze the structural and cultural factors behind contemporary family disintegration in Nigeria.
2. To examine the role of intergenerational glue-bearers in maintaining family cohesion.
3. To propose a conflict-sensitive framework for rebuilding family systems through intentional succession and rhythm-building.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Restoring family cohesion has implications for national security, crime prevention, mental health, and social capital. Families that function effectively reduce the burden on formal justice systems, provide early warning against youth radicalization, and sustain cultural identity. This paper provides a practical framework for families and community leaders.

### **1.5 Methodology**

The study uses qualitative content analysis of contemporary discourse on family breakdown, supported by family systems theory and social cohesion literature. It integrates applied frameworks from Akinade's works on community policing, conflict prevention, social and human security, and communication in law enforcement.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory views the family as an emotional unit where each member's behavior affects others. Bowen's concept of differentiation and triangulation explains how unresolved conflict persists across

generations when not mediated. In traditional Nigerian families, elders functioned as non-anxious presences who reduced triangulation and maintained differentiation.

## **2.2 Social Cohesion and Social Capital**

Putnam and Fukuyama define social cohesion as the strength of relationships and trust within a group. The Nigerian extended family was a dense network of bonding social capital. When key nodes die without replacement, the network fragments.

## **2.3 Conflict Prevention and Community Resilience**

Akinade's Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution and Prevention demonstrates that conflicts become intractable when early mediation mechanisms collapse. The same applies within families. The loss of internal mediators transforms minor disputes into protracted legal battles.

## **2.4 Communication and Documentation in Relationship Maintenance**

Akinade's Communication Skills in Security Documentation in Law Enforcement emphasizes that clarity, timing, and record-keeping prevent escalation. These principles apply to family communication. Unrecorded agreements, unspoken grievances, and absent documentation fuel conflict.

## **2.5 Social and Human Security for Sustainable Development**

Akinade's Social and Human Security for Sustainable Development establishes that sustainable development depends on the security of individuals and communities at the family and local level. When families disintegrate, human security is compromised, and sustainable development is undermined.

# **3. Analysis of the Phenomenon: Why Families Are Not the Same**

## **3.1 The Role of the Glue-Bearer**

The glue-bearer was not merely an elder but a functional role. Characteristics included:

- Burden of unity: Belief that keeping the family together was a personal assignment.
- Proactive communication: Calling, visiting, and reminding members of kinship.
- Conflict mediation: Resolving disputes before external intervention.
- Cultural transmission: Telling stories, enforcing rituals, maintaining memory.

When these individuals die without succession planning, the function disappears.

## **3.2 Mistaking Presence for Permanence**

Families deferred reconciliation and communication, assuming elders would always mediate. This created a single point of failure. The absence of institutionalized succession planning meant that the system collapsed with the individual.

### **3.3 Grief and the Breakdown of Gathering Mechanisms**

In many Nigerian cultures, death was designed to re-consolidate kinship. Today, funerals often become the last reunion. Unresolved disputes at funerals persist for decades, leading to litigation between siblings. The peacemaker is buried, but the peace is not inherited.

### **3.4 The Myth of Inimitability**

Younger generations often reject the role by stating “I can’t be like Baba.” This confuses method with mission. The mission is unity; the method can be modernized through technology, new rhythms, and adapted practices.

## **4. Consequences of Family Disintegration**

### **4.1 Loss of Identity and Belonging**

Youth who do not know their cousins or village history lack a sense of rootedness. This affects mental health and increases vulnerability to negative peer influence.

### **4.2 Escalation of Property and Inheritance Disputes**

Without internal mediation, disputes move to courts, increasing cost, delay, and hostility.

### **4.3 Erosion of Community Resilience**

Families are the first line of response to economic shock, illness, and insecurity. Fragmented families cannot mobilize collective resources.

### **4.4 National Security Implications**

Akinade’s Community Policing: Strategic Approaches in Crime Prevention shows that weak family systems reduce community resilience against crime and extremism. Youth without family oversight are more susceptible to recruitment by criminal networks.

## **5. A Framework for Rebuilding Family Systems**

### **5.1 Principle 1: Name the New Glue**

Every family requires a designated glue-bearer or team. This is not about title but intention. The glue-bearer assumes responsibility for communication, mediation, and event coordination. The role can rotate or be shared among siblings.

### **5.2 Principle 2: Create Intentional Rhythms**

Rituals sustain relationships. Families should establish:

- Monthly virtual or physical family meetings
- Annual reunions or picnics
- Shared digital platforms for birthdays, announcements, and prayer

Akinade's Managing Security and Safety in Tourism, Cultural Festivals and Mega Events provides a model for planning, communication, and participation that can be adapted for family events.

### **5.3 Principle 3: Preserve and Transmit Stories**

Oral history is lost if not recorded. Families should conduct structured interviews with elders, record voice notes, and create family archives. This preserves identity and provides material for conflict resolution.

### **5.4 Principle 4: Adopt Rapid Reconciliation Protocols**

Borrowing from conflict mediation, families should adopt rules:

1. No grievance older than 30 days without a mediation attempt.
2. Greeting precedes apology.
3. Use neutral third parties within the family for mediation.

Akinade's Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations emphasizes de-escalation through timely communication.

### **5.5 Principle 5: Integrate the Next Generation**

Children must know their cousins, extended family, and ancestral home. Families should organize youth camps, visits to the village, and joint service projects to build cross-sibling bonds.

### **5.6 Principle 6: Institutionalize Documentation**

Family constitutions, agreements on property, and records of decisions prevent future disputes. Akinade's documentation framework can be adapted to create family records that reduce ambiguity.

## **6. The Role of Traditional Institutions, Religious Bodies, and Civil Society**

### **6.1 Traditional Rulers**

Obas, Emirs, and Chiefs can convene family reconciliation councils and recognize glue-bearers formally, giving them social legitimacy.

### **6.2 Religious Institutions**

Churches and mosques can provide platforms for family counseling, marriage enrichment, and intergenerational dialogue. They can also host family archives.

### **6.3 Civil Society Organizations**

CSOs can train glue-bearers in mediation, communication, and family governance. They can develop toolkits and facilitate peer learning across families.

## **7. Policy Recommendations**

### **7.1 For Families**

1. Hold a family council to designate a glue-bearer or team within 90 days.
2. Create a family communication platform and calendar of events.
3. Record oral histories from elders above 70 years old within 6 months.
4. Draft a simple family constitution covering dispute resolution and property.

### **7.2 For Traditional and Religious Leaders**

1. Establish Family Reconciliation Desks in palaces and religious centers.
2. Publicly recognize and commission glue-bearers annually.
3. Integrate family cohesion modules into pre-marital and marriage counseling.

### **7.3 For Government and CSOs**

1. Include family cohesion indicators in community resilience assessments.
2. Fund training programs for family mediators through the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.
3. Develop public awareness campaigns on intergenerational responsibility.

## **8. Conclusion**

The fragmentation of Nigerian families is not primarily a moral failure but a systems failure. The death of glue-bearers without succession planning has created a vacuum in mediation, communication, and cultural transmission. The solution lies in intentional succession, modernized rhythms, and institutionalized documentation. When one person in each family decides to pick up the mantle, the system begins to repair itself. The chair must not remain empty. The family must not be buried twice.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Family Council Agenda Template**

1. Opening prayer and recognition of ancestors
2. Review of family events since last meeting
3. Discussion of disputes or concerns
4. Assignment of roles for next quarter
5. Planning of next gathering

### **Appendix B: Family Constitution Outline**

1. Preamble and values
2. Membership and definition of family
3. Dispute resolution mechanism
4. Property management rules
5. Communication protocols

### **Appendix C: Oral History Interview Guide**

1. When and how did the family come to this location?
2. What are the key stories of resilience and conflict?
3. What values must not be lost?
4. What advice do you have for the next generation?

### **Appendix D: 12-Month Family Cohesion Calendar Template**

- Month 1: Virtual prayer call
- Month 2: Birthday celebration planning
- Month 3: Visit to ancestral home
- Month 4: Family skills workshop
- Month 5: Youth and cousin bonding activity
- Month 6: Mid-year review meeting
- Month 7: Cultural storytelling session
- Month 8: Community service project
- Month 9: Family health check
- Month 10: Pre-December planning meeting
- Month 11: Reconciliation and forgiveness session
- Month 12: Annual reunion and review.

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