

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMED AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

TRENDS AND PROSPECTS
FROM NORTHEAST NIGERIA

OVERVIEW OF
CONFLICT LANDSCAPE



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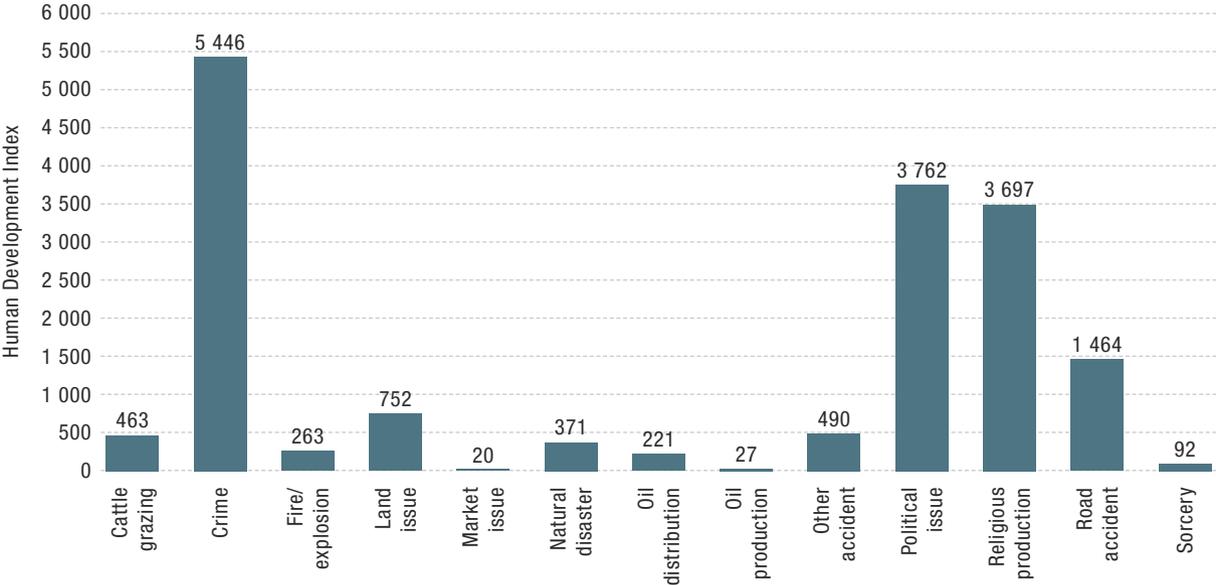
NIGERIA'S CONFLICT LANDSCAPE

According to a Nigeria Watch report (Figure 1), the challenges to peace and stability stem from the high incidence of crime, as well as economic, religious and politically motivated issues. In 2020, a total of 12 318 Nigerians lost their lives in 2 677 lethal incidences that were caused by banditry and violent insurgency in the north, extrajudicial

killings during the Covid-19 lockdown and protests against police brutality.

This section unpacks the economic drivers and consequences of Nigeria's conflict hotspots. What emerges from a discussion of these dynamics is a sense that Nigeria's conflict systems are underpinned by

FIGURE 1: Main causes of violent deaths in 2020



Source: Nigeria Watch 2020 report, p. 8

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intensifying violence over scarce resources, inequitable distribution of national wealth, and grievances against the state. While these conflict systems are largely driven by economic and material considerations, a feedback loop has emerged whereby the onset of these conflicts has inflicted further economic hardships. This vicious cycle of inequitable distribution, instability and further marginalisation characterises each of the discussed pockets of instability, including the lived reality in Borno and Kano where local communities were consulted for this research, and whose experiences are shared later in this section.

While Nigeria's federal government has succeeded in regaining territories previously under Boko Haram's control, it has had limited success in curbing the sources of recurrent violence. A majority of displaced people continue to live in overcrowded and degrading conditions without access to food, clean water and sanitation. Young children are especially vulnerable to malnutrition and disease from the lack of clean water, and have poor access to education and other protection services.

In the Middle Belt, decades-long conflicts between farmers and pastoralists have devastated local communities, drastically reducing both security and economic activity, including opportunities for economic participation and employment. The conflicts have taken an enormous toll on the economic health of families and households, and undermine regional economic progress. Likewise, eroded trust due to violent conflict is a critical factor preventing productive economic behaviour. Figure 2 illustrates the extent of the

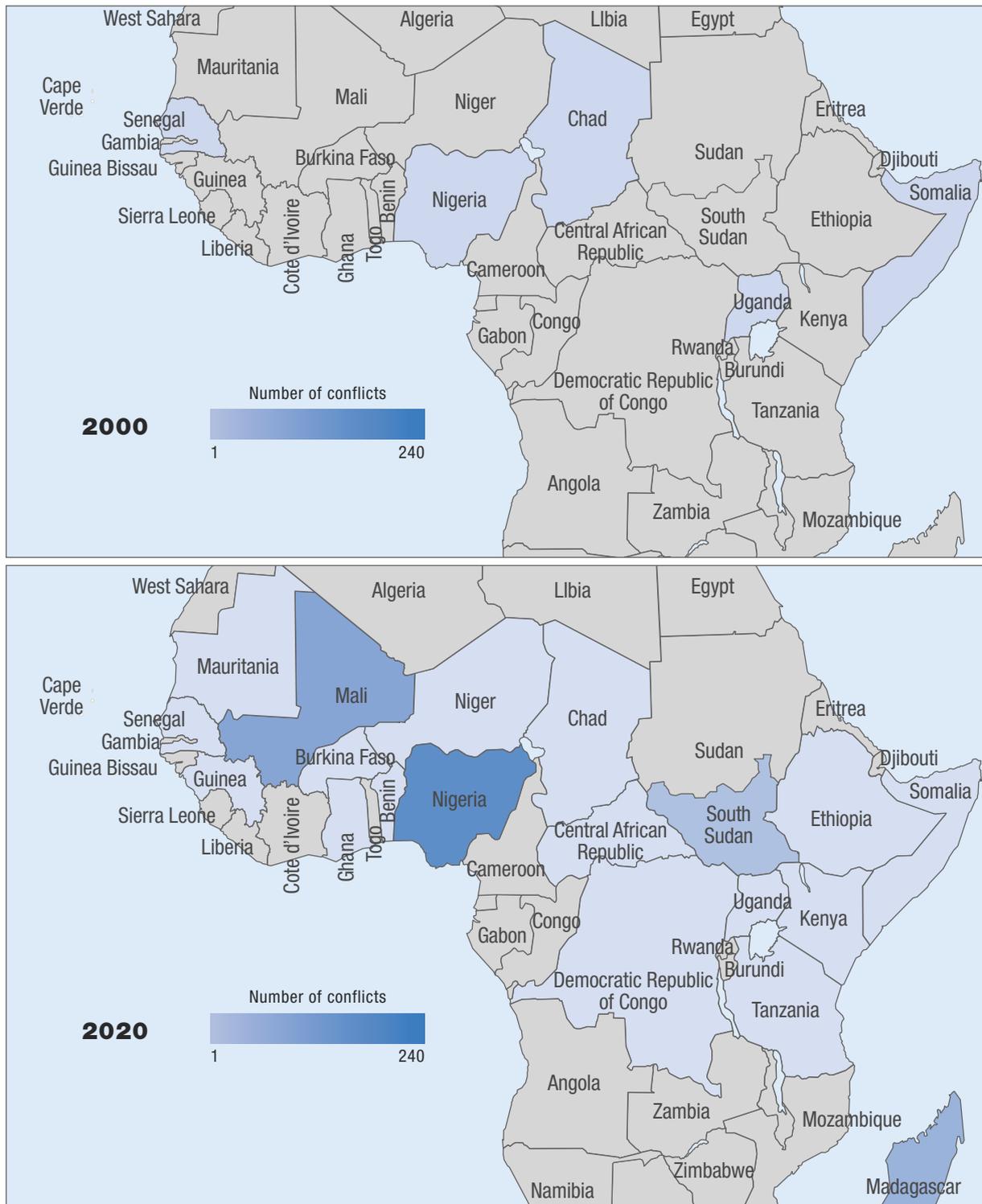
intensifying pastoralist conflicts, with Nigeria seeing the steepest increase in sub-Saharan Africa of pastoralist-related conflicts over the last two decades. From 2016 to 2018, an estimated 3 641 people were killed due to farmer–pastoralist clashes, with about 182 530 people displaced and 5 000 properties destroyed.

While farmer–pastoralist violence has primarily targeted men, it is women and children who often bear the brunt of the devastation created by violence, particularly in the hard-hit states of Kaduna, Benue and Plateau. Conflicts in the Middle Belt have centred on competition for natural resources, including farmland, grazing areas and water points for farms, animals and households.

The conflicts have taken an enormous toll on the economic health of families and households, and undermine regional economic progress

Other land-related conflict triggers include high population growth and commercial farming practices which have increased the demand for farmland in areas formerly designated as grazing pastures. This has denied pastoralists access to wetlands that create little risk of livestock straying into farms. This situation is further exacerbated by the problem of persistent drought and desertification, which has forced pastoralists southwards in search of pasture, and which has only stimulated more conflicts, fracturing very fragile state economies.

FIGURE 2: Pastoralist-related conflicts by country in 2000 and 2020



Source: Armed Conflict and Location Event Data, author's own calculations

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In a 2015 report into the economic costs of conflict, it was estimated that Nigeria's federal government potentially loses US\$13.7 billion annually due to the farmer–pastoralist conflicts, while the worst affected states lose an average 47% of their potential locally generated revenue.

In the northwest, the new frontier of instability today, violent conflicts are caused by a number of complex and inter-related factors. Arms proliferation in the region and among pastoralists has resulted in an increase in armed clashes. Figure 3 shows this trend, with as many as 43 armed clashes recorded in 2019 alone. Criminal activities in the region include cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and illegal mining.

In addition to the reoccurring and intensifying farmer–pastoralist clashes (Figures 2 and 3) over access and control of land and water resources, arms proliferation and the

organisation of criminal gangs operating from ungoverned parts of the region pose a substantial risk to human security and economic development. As security has deteriorated, the region has steadily come under the renewed influence of jihadist groups.

The spate of violence in the northwest has also had a far-reaching humanitarian and economic impact and created a domino effect of security problems. In the past decade, over 8 000 people have been killed, with another 200 000 internally displaced. Agriculture, which provides a source of livelihood and employment for 80% of local populations, has been especially affected. Attacks on farmers are believed to be a major contributor to the national unemployment crisis. Large areas of farmlands remain uncultivated as farmers have abandoned their lands for fear of being attacked or kidnapped. These disruptions

FIGURE 3: Armed clashes involving pastoralists



Sources: *Armed Conflict & Location Event Data*, author's own calculations

have impoverished farmers and herders alike, caused hikes in food prices and aggravated malnutrition, particularly among children. In addition, thousands of businesses have shut down and business owners have fled the region due to the rising level of insecurity. Local trade routes for transporting agricultural and non-food products have also become unsafe due to the activities of bandits and other criminal groups on the highways. Investor confidence has plunged significantly, with the region continuing to experience capital flight.

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In the Niger Delta, the conflict that resurged in 2017 is driven by complex factors that encompass ethnic, developmental, environmental, generational, communal and corporate characteristics. Political and economic marginalisation as well as poor governance have created stark inequalities and social indicators for the region that are worse than the national average. Oil pollution caused by equipment failure, vandalism and theft have destroyed fertile land and made traditional livelihoods tied to agriculture and fishing unviable. According to a 2015 report, crude oil theft in the region amounts to approximately 150 000 barrels per day, with 75% destined for international sale, while 25% is refined

and consumed locally in the Niger Delta. More recently, it has been reported that between January 2021 and February 2022, US\$3.2 billion was lost in crude oil theft. To cite one example, the Bonny terminal receives only 3 000 of the 20 000 barrels it is supposed to receive daily. Such criminality, which is dominated by men, both adults and youths, means that tensions easily escalate into violence, with women and children disproportionately affected by its consequences. Equally, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among armed groups operating in the region has had the effect of escalating and intensifying conflicts whenever they arise.

In the southeast, where the revival of Igbo nationalism and demand for Biafran independence has existed for a long time and gained momentum through the 2000s, current trends of activism, protests and separatist narratives are impacting the economic landscape. Ethnic nationalism fuelling calls for secession is caused by resentment over marginalisation, poor representation in governance, low capital infrastructure investments by the federal government, dominance by northerners, and perceptions that corruption works against the business interests of the Igbo people. While there is no conclusive research on the economic costs of the separatist agitations by the Igbos, reports of ongoing tensions point to its damaging effects on trade relations and commerce. In 2021, for instance, a northern onion producers' and traders' association suspended onion supply to the southeast in response to the violence against northerners and their businesses in the south. In addition, following a notice by northern groups

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threatening Igbos to leave the north, reports emerged that retail traders and business owners, many of whom were Igbos, relocated to the southeast, disrupting economic activity and investments in the north.

Lived reality in Borno and Kano: Where dwindling economic agency meets human insecurity

For over a decade, persistent conflict in northeast Nigeria has claimed countless lives, destroyed critical infrastructure, displaced millions of people and destabilised economic, education and health systems. This reality has produced adverse effects for human productivity and development in the region and the country at large. Insurgency-related violence carried out by Boko Haram and its more violent offshoot, the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), remains the major driver of insecurity across northeast Nigeria. The insurgency and persistent insecurity in the region are inseparable from the pre-existing socio-economic deprivation and harsh environmental conditions prevalent in key northeast states – Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. These states were not only some of the poorest in the country prior to the insurgency, but they continue to suffer its consequences today. The insurgency has been especially damaging to education, as teachers and schools have been deliberately targeted by insurgents. In 2020 alone, an estimated 1.8 million students were out of school that would have been enrolled in school if not for the insurgency.

In a 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report compared the implications of conflict versus no-conflict

scenarios on development and economic outcomes in the northeast. The analysis showed that under no-conflict conditions, GDP growth spurred by development outcomes was likely to have averaged over 5% every year from 2008 to 2030. This analysis factored in rapid population growth estimates for the region, projected progress in poverty alleviation, nutrition, infant mortality and social mobility, as well as a modest increase in GDP per capita (by 1.7% on average over the same period). The impacts of these stalled development outcomes under the prevailing conflict situation, in terms of missed opportunities and lost lives, are immense and will affect the population in the region for decades.

The insurgency has been especially damaging to education, as teachers and schools have been deliberately targeted by insurgents

Across the northeast, adverse socio-economic conditions pre-existed the emergence of violent armed groups (a phenomenon that can be found across every region in Nigeria). However, pull factors – such as coercion by an influencing family member, social deprivation and poverty, poor literacy and insufficient critical thinking skills among young men and, more recently, the excesses of security forces – have provided the opportunity and legitimacy for many at-risk individuals to address historic grievances linked to identity, socio-economic exclusion and poor sense of belonging in their communities, through Boko Haram and other similar armed groups.

Notably, the findings of the qualitative research data collected for this publication show that economic factors – poverty, promise of money to take care of family, substance abuse driven by deprivation, poor employment prospects and economic marginalisation because of tribe or religion – far outweigh political and religious factors in terms of motivating people to join Boko Haram. When asked ‘What do you think motivates people to participate in acts of violence?’ and ‘When you think about a group like Boko Haram, what do you think makes them attractive to young men?’, over 70% of the 60 research respondents referred to material factors or development deficits such as hunger, poverty, poor economic opportunities and prospects for social mobility, as well as unemployment as key drivers of recruitment into violent extremism. Another commonly cited driver was ethnic fracturing, which appears to be underpinned by inequities of distribution and access to opportunities. Youth reflected on these material drivers from various angles:

It is poverty to me. Lack of money makes our youths especially frustrated. Any little thing that is not even supposed to raise alarm makes them violent because they are already facing lots of problems and challenges. Some have their certificates looking for jobs everywhere to no avail. They have no hope of going somewhere to look for jobs. Some states will ask you if you are an indigene before they give you a job. This makes the youths easily provoked and violent.

Female respondent, Borno State, community activist, 28 years old

Our youth now are frustrated because they don't have work to do and such a group attracts them because they hope to get money from there.

Male respondent, Kano State civil servant, 40+ years old

Most people find it hard to eat once a day. So, once they are given small money, they can do anything to survive. Some join this group because they want to make money as fast as possible.

Male respondent, Borno State, youth leader, 29 years old

Many graduates are unemployed and not given jobs that they are qualified for due to either religious differences or tribalism. Such youths find the group attractive because they want to fight for their rights.

Male respondent, Borno State, civil servant, 37 years old

To the question, ‘What are the biggest threats to social cohesion faced by your community today?’, one in three (30%) respondents referred to material considerations such as poor economic opportunities, unemployment and poverty. Unanimously, all respondents agreed that the lack of government investments in their communities was responsible for young people joining Boko Haram, underscoring the critical role of the equitable distribution of the country’s commonwealth in fostering peace and cohesion. Respondents in the area shared the following thoughts:

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If the government can help parents to educate their children and build hospitals, provide good roads and clean water, by so doing our children won't want to join [Boko Haram] because they are educated.

*Female respondent,
NGO staff, 30 years old*

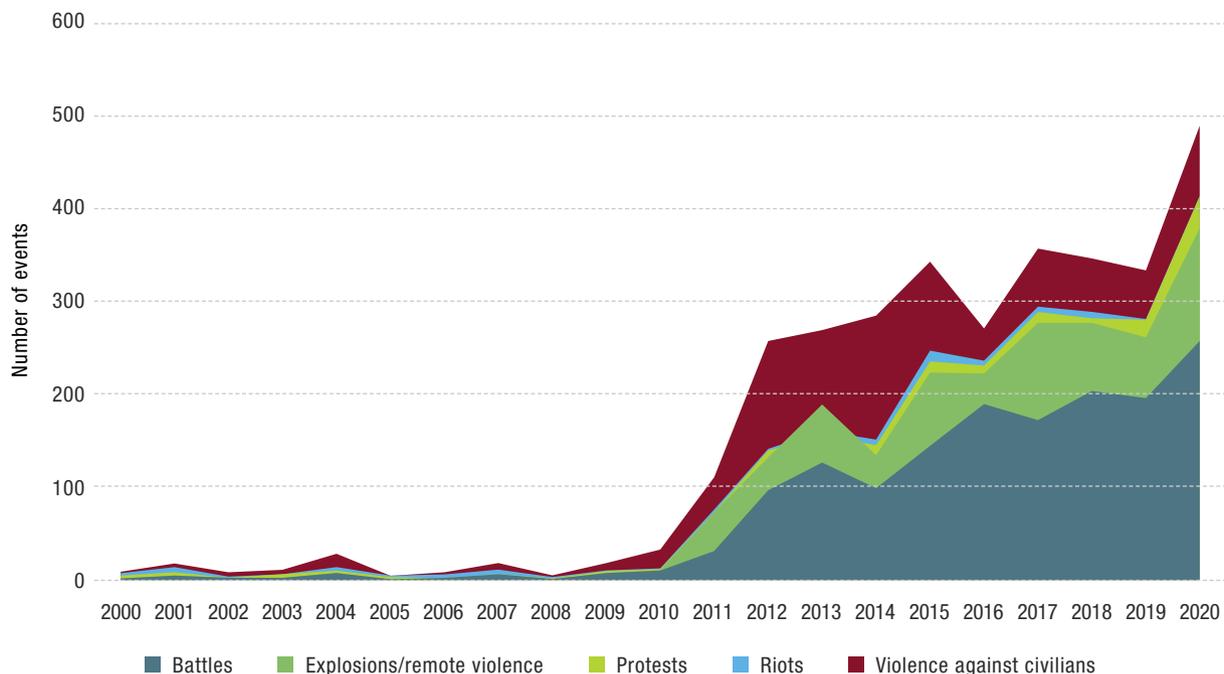
The government has not provided an enabling environment for the youth. When the youth have things to do, the community will progress.

*Male respondent, Borno State,
internally displaced persons (IDP)
camp leader, 43 years old*

Pervasive crime and impunity in insufficiently policed or ungoverned semi-rural or rural areas across Nigeria is another major challenge to stability and human development. The disparity in the government's control in urban versus rural areas has widened over time owing to factors such as poor rural governance and security architecture, and also urban migration, which has shifted the government's focus. This gap has led to the growing incidence of violence and conflict.

This is exemplified by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which recorded an increasing number of conflict events in Kano and Borno over the last decade. Figure 4 shows that since 2010 there has been a steep increase in the number of battles, explosions and violence

FIGURE 4: Conflict events in Kano and Borno



Sources: ACLED

against civilians. Crimes such as banditry and cattle rustling in already weaponised and tense contexts often act as major triggers of violent conflict that spirals into score settling and reprisal attacks. As such, it opens the door to broader violence.

This environment further impacts the livelihoods of local residents by creating even more barriers to doing business, thus inciting a vicious cycle of constraints on prosperity. A civil servant in Borno commented on this nexus between weak security and eroding livelihoods:

We used to go far and wide to farm, but now we cannot go outside the immediate vicinity to farm and help ourselves because Boko Haram operates in those areas. Where we even go and farm, the fear is that in the end, our crops would be stolen and some people will be killed in the process.

Male respondent, Borno State, civil servant, 28 years old

Of concern to local residents in the area and forming part of ‘violence against civilians’ (Figure 4) is the heightened risk of kidnappings or abductions. This concern was expressed by numerous locals that were consulted for this research:

We can no longer send goods to neighbouring states because of banditry and kidnapers on the roads.

Male respondent, Borno State, youth leader, 29 years old

What happened recently in Kaduna – the kidnapping of school children – which left the parents of the children with no choice but to enter the bush themselves in search of their children is tragic. The parents of those children only found their shoes. Before the security agencies came, the whole thing was over.

Male respondent, Borno State, University of Maiduguri student, 30 years old

The kidnappings are impacting both trade prospects and the mental well-being of locals, who report living in fear. The latter has implications for how individuals make decisions, increasing their propensity to participate in risky behaviour while also breaking down their willingness to communicate or mediate.

All of this is underpinned by a weak security sector, which has given rise to private security arrangements involving local vigilante groups. This has resulted in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the collapse of channels of conflict resolution. Channels for mediation are largely informal, with locals indicating that conflict resolution is typically carried out through local community elders, religious leaders and, to a lesser extent, institutional stakeholders. Locals indicate that these stakeholders are preferred because they are trustworthy, and that they will only seek help from the police or another state apparatus as a last resort. Alongside unaccountable private security, this has shifted the responsibility for and channels of security to citizens to protect and defend

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themselves in the face of the state's declining capacity to do so.

The absence of state protection of lives and property, as well as the increased privatisation of violence in these settings, tends to quickly inflate and escalate conflicts between groups while the perpetrators and instigators of this violence very often escape justice. However, without inclusive

development that addresses the material drivers of the conflict, sustainable and positive peace will remain an elusive ideal.

The kidnappings are impacting both trade prospects and the mental well-being of locals, who report living in fear

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Nigeria

- 1. The Government of Nigeria must commit to an inclusive development agenda that will address the disparities in human development between the north and south of the country** so that marginalised communities can better adapt to and overcome shocks that induce scarcity, such as economic downturns, climate change and persistent instability. This includes prioritising greater funding for educational facilities, hospitals and utility infrastructure. This is also necessary to support communities in Kano and Borno to overcome the material deprivation caused by instability and violence.
- 2. The pervasive problem of idle youth in the northeast of Nigeria must be dealt with urgently and decisively.** One approach would involve Nigeria addressing macro-economic volatility, driven largely by external trade shocks and the country's reliance on oil export earnings. This situation continues

to erode government revenues and weaken public expenditure on critical infrastructure that would create economic impacts domestically. Skills development centres, knowledge-sharing programmes, investment in vocational education and access to capital can help youths to become active participants in Nigeria's economy, thereby contributing to inclusive growth and stability.

- 3. Nigeria must begin to pursue a deliberate and aggressive macro-economic policy that improves budgetary planning and execution, and provides a platform for sustained economic diversification and non-oil-sector growth as key priorities.** The process of achieving this should involve de-linking public capital expenditures from oil revenues and adopting an appropriate fiscal policy that shores up government savings, ensures intergenerational equity and suits the country's social and economic challenges.

4. **Strengthening budget preparation and execution, and paying particular attention to pro-poor expenditures within government budgets to meet the targets of the SDGs**, will also be central to improving the efficiency and impact of government spending, which will improve service delivery to Nigerians. Weaknesses in budget implementation, transparency and monitoring have resulted in many incomplete projects and the mismanagement of public funds.
5. **Nigeria must also now consider the privatisation of many state-owned companies that hold dominant actor status in strategic sectors of the national economy.** Corruption, poor management and underperformance have eroded the potentials of such state-owned companies and turned them into a significant financial drain on the treasury. Privatisation will drive a profit motive that accelerates efficiency and growth, promote competition that creates innovation and progress, and create opportunities for smaller businesses to operate within the economy and generate employment.
6. **It is essential that structural violence is addressed decisively so that score settling and reprisal attacks are minimised.** This requires short-term interventions to prevent the spread of light arms as well as effective channels to deliver justice for victims, and medium-term interventions that address the growing scarcity faced by pastoralist-farmer communities that are most likely to participate in revenge attacks.
7. **Projects to address the pastoralist-farmer conflicts can come through development projects in the integrated agricultural sector**, such as supporting women and youth to start small-scale value chain businesses – for example, small businesses that turn crop waste into food for cattle.
8. **Incentivise private sector investment and development in post-conflict communities** by improving the security infrastructure, introducing tax holidays, waivers or subsidy, and investing in power systems, transport infrastructure and programmes that progress the capabilities of marginalised local communities. For example, establish cottage industries that create opportunities for employment for local populations and eliminate the incentives for engaging in violence while also decreasing vulnerability.

To the international community

1. **Assist marginalised communities in acquiring capital for small businesses** as well as programmes or information materials on how to start and manage a small business.
2. **Undertake research that informs the skills that would be in demand in the coming decade** so that the government, the private sector and civil society can work together in exposing youth to meaningful skills development opportunities.

3. **Work with the government and local communities to develop and support projects that empower small-scale integrated agriculture businesses**, such as turning crop waste into cattle feed, which can also have a positive effect on farmer–pastoralist relations.
4. **To tackle corruption, the international community can help with the design and rollout of electronic systems** that manage state finances and create transparency in key risk areas such as procurement.
2. **Civil society can play an important role in helping youth secure apprenticeships with established craftsmen or entrepreneurs.** Such programmes can help prevent youth from being recruited into violent extremist groups and gangs, while facilitating skills transfer and increasing their future income prospects.
3. **To prevent competition over scarce resources from turning violent, civil society and NGOs must foster greater collaboration with the private sector**, through which impactful investment, skills transfer and market-driven development can help bring marginalised communities into the national economy.

To civil society

1. **Ultimately, Nigeria’s central challenge is one of building strong domestic institutions** with the capacity to strengthen transparency and accountability systems and support long-term growth and development. Civil society and government must therefore work closely to monitor, report and promote a culture of openness and accountability in government spending on public capital projects to minimise waste and corruption.
4. **Civil society collaboration with the private sector can also help reduce scarcity of grazing land, a factor at the heart of intensifying farmer–pastoralist conflicts.** For example, assisting small-scale farmers to implement systems that will improve crop yields on smaller parcels of land can help create more grazing land for pastoralists without harming the profits of small-scale farmers.

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The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000 by officials who worked in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy are taken into account and utilised in advancing the interests of national reconciliation across Africa. The IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. The IJR is based in Cape Town, South Africa.

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