

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMED AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

TRENDS AND PROSPECTS
FROM NORTHEAST NIGERIA



IJR
THE INSTITUTE
FOR JUSTICE AND
RECONCILIATION



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FROM NORTHEAST NIGERIA

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Data Event Project
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
ISWAP	Islamic State's West Africa Province
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

SUMMARY

Human development is typically considered a significant determinant of national progress and stability. In Nigeria, while the potential exists, structural challenges that affect governance outcomes, as well as social and economic opportunities for human advancement, have eroded the resilience of vulnerable communities and populations. The consequences have created a vicious cycle of violence and conflict which continues to undermine the potential to transform

conflict contexts into peaceful societies. The use of the social contract lens to explain complex development challenges, such as entrenched inequalities, poor service delivery, environmental damage and weak institutions, presents options for policy and institutional interventions by government, supported by development actors, civil society, communities and the private sector to promote a more just, equitable society that prioritises peace and stability.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the human suffering and immense economic and social costs of violence and conflicts on nation building are immeasurable. The loss of human life, destruction of trade, livelihoods and infrastructure, mass displacement and general uncertainty produced by decades of violence and conflicts in various parts of the country have impeded and, in some cases, reversed development trends, and consequently inclusive economic growth. This raises the important question of how to escape the drivers and cycles of sustained violence and conflict. The research at hand considers how investments in human, social and economic development might create a pathway to transform volatile communities into peaceful ones.

Through an analysis of long-standing and emerging conflict systems in

Nigeria, this research finds that a vicious cycle of economic hardship and poor governance fuels violence and instability, which then further worsens the socio-economic prospects for individuals and communities. Pockets of violence are often caused by the systemic interaction of constraints on prosperity, rule of law deficits and insufficient social protection, which are in turn exacerbated by the onset of conflict. Low levels of human development and high levels of material and social deprivation characterise conflict systems across the country, and in particular in the northeast, where locals were consulted for this research on various topics such as the drivers of conflict in their region, the biggest threats to peace and the effectiveness of peacebuilding infrastructure.

SECTION ONE



BACKGROUND

In socio-economic terms, while Nigeria has recorded some progress over the past decade on its human capital development, the country ranked 150 out of 157 countries in the 2020 World Bank Human Capital Index.¹ At the heart of Nigeria's constrained development and instability challenge is its poor, unaccountable system of governance, which has failed to produce social and economic reforms and dividends that directly advance the basic capabilities of society. Among other factors, insufficient infrastructure, lack of independent and effective institutions, high levels of poverty and deprivation, insecurity fuelled by weak rule of law, marginalisation and regional inequalities all contribute to the massive development challenges facing Nigeria today.

Over time, the oil-dependent economy has cultivated a rent-seeking system of governance² that has fuelled corruption, delegitimised the political system and increased economic inequalities. Historic macro-economic performance lays out the impressive potential of Nigeria's economy and points to its resilience, which in the past had produced progress in human

development. Yet, distributional injustices and unequal economic growth have created an inequity within the national economy that has resulted in unequal access to, and quality of, social services and economic opportunities. This has helped to sustain the high level of poverty that continues to worsen grievances and hold back development for the majority. These act as pull factors to violence.³ For populations in the north, economic disparities compared to the rest of the country reflect the consequences of inequitable distribution on stability.⁴

Over time, the oil-dependent economy has cultivated a rent-seeking system of governance that has fuelled corruption

Beyond the enormous effects of corruption and mismanagement of public resources on human and economic development, the waves of localised conflicts, government's poor handling of the economy, and the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic have

SECTION ONE

complicated the development challenge. In 2020, Nigeria experienced its deepest recession in two decades, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth contracting by 6.1%, largely due to the slowdown in economic activity caused by the national lockdown, border closures and job losses during the pandemic.⁵ In the same period, the spate of violence and economic crimes soared, including acts of banditry, kidnapping and cybercrimes.⁶ In addition, the sharp decline in oil prices, foreign exchange shortages, and investment capital flight have had a devastating effect on the

economy and the economic opportunities available to Nigerians. Within this context, the economic agency of most Nigerians has been eroded, throwing marginalised groups into a vicious cycle of human and economic insecurity.

The research at hand explores the central features of the human development approach, how it can strengthen resilience within fragile societies, and the opportunities or pathways it presents for transforming and re-establishing peaceful communities across Nigeria.

SECTION TWO

2

WHAT CONDITIONS ARE NECESSARY TO PROGRESS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT?

To understand the approaches to human development that promote peace and prosperity, it is crucial to first identify the state structure that best achieves it. This is based on the premise that capable and resilient institutions and systems that form the bedrock of peaceful societies are the product of intentional state-building over time.⁷ The process by which many developed or developing countries have escaped fragility has involved an emphasis on the building and nurturing of specific institutions that advance prosperity for their populations.⁸ These institutions have disincentivised arbitrary use of state power and created access to public resources to advance human development and security.

In a well-functioning society, rules and institutions are underpinned by civic culture. Such rules shape interactions between governments and their citizens, both those which are constitutional in nature and those that emerge as norms. On the other hand, some institutions provide oversight that assures more inclusive policy-making and government action, while others enable governments to foster human and economic security, while

also implementing public programmes with wide benefits for their citizens. On this premise, state fragility is often the outcome of a state structure that has not nurtured the institutional frameworks necessary for effective and inclusive governance. Governments operating in contexts of conflict or fragility must therefore orientate their approach to governance in ways that emphasise inclusive identities and values to support peaceful political and governance processes, implement the rule of law consistently, and advance policies that lift citizens out of poverty, as a means of achieving peace, prosperity and progress.⁹

Many developed or developing countries have escaped fragility with an emphasis on the building and nurturing of specific institutions that advance prosperity for their populations

Human development encompasses a focus on people, opportunities and choices. This

requires government policies and responses that directly improve the lives and capabilities of citizens, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups rather than ones that operate on the philosophy that economic progress and/or growth would automatically translate into opportunities and well-being.¹⁰ The human development approach centres on empowering individuals and collectives through freedoms and opportunities to lead healthy and creative lives, acquire knowledge, and enjoy fair access to the resources that help create a dignified standard of living.¹¹ These conditions must of course operate in a context of gender equality, environmental sustainability, human security and the protection of rights.

For national governments, this requires aligning development objectives, policies and interventions to integrate the ambitious targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which demand concerted investments to achieve ‘peace, prosperity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet’.¹² In human development terms, this equates to investing in services that keep people healthy, providing access to quality education, and delivering social support and a safety net for families and individuals at different stages of their lives. It also means building systems that enable early intervention and support to vulnerable populations in times of crisis. Equally important, this development approach requires that citizens play their part in sustaining this arrangement as part of the social contract.

Accountability and oversight over public and democratic institutions, which drive inclusion, participation and representation

in decision making linked to social and economic reforms, are also crucial to sustainable human development. This includes the freedom of all citizens to participate in democratic processes that lead to competitive and inclusive political participation, and protects their rights to influence policy and democratic outcomes.¹³ Achieving these requires the strengthened capacity and independence of such institutions to promote the rule of law, good governance, democratic principles and the protection of human rights for all groups. Furthermore, effective control and accountability of executive power through the pillars of governance – judicial and parliamentary oversight – fostered through public vigilance over that arrangement by the civil society sector, is essential to eliminating the tensions and feelings of disenfranchisement that sometimes spill over into violence and internal conflict.

Accountability and oversight over public and democratic institutions are also crucial to sustainable human development

Governments must also build or strengthen institutional capacity to contain structural and human violence when it occurs, and act preventively by establishing systems that disincentive violence and promote peaceful and cooperative behaviour.¹⁴ To achieve this, governments must foster social cohesion that reduces disparities, inequalities and social exclusion within or between societal groups, and strengthens social relations, interactions and trust.¹⁵ Allowing disparities

that coincide with political or identity (ethnic or religious) divisions, sometimes driven by long-standing grievances, significantly harms the resilience of societies to resist the onset of violent conflict, particularly states already affected by conflict or fragility.

Allowing disparities that coincide with political or identity divisions, sometimes driven by long-standing grievances, significantly harms the resilience of societies to resist the onset of violent conflict

State legitimacy in delivering inclusive economic growth, providing basic services, achieving development outcomes, enhancing social cohesion and promoting equity and fair processes, often through service delivery,¹⁶ is vital to human development. Government capacity to deliver the jobs, public services, citizen security and opportunities that people need is essential to peace and the cooperation of citizens.¹⁷ This also includes addressing

the indirect causes of instability, violence or conflict, such as climate crises. These intensify competition for natural resources and squeeze economic opportunities, often for minorities or marginalised groups. In this context, citizens' perceptions of government legitimacy cannot be viewed solely through the lens of whether citizens can access a service, but also by how effectively that service is delivered.¹⁸

While governments must play a leading role, achieving human development requires a whole-of-society response to deliver sustained, replicable results. Development collaborators such as civil society actors, media agencies, and human rights and multilateral institutions must join efforts to deliver the dividends of peace, justice and inclusion as implementers and advocates, especially for under-represented groups. For its part, the private sector must lead efforts to ensure the equitable distribution of economic opportunities that advance inclusion and promote the rule of law by eliminating acts of environmental damage and corruption as prerequisites for creating a physical and social environment conducive for human development.¹⁹

SECTION THREE



CONSTRAINTS ON PROSPERITY

Today, Nigeria is struggling with a profound crisis of governance. Its economic potential is constrained by numerous structural issues, including inadequate infrastructure, tariff and non-tariff barriers to commerce and trade, wholesale corruption, poor political governance and a high rate of insecurity in many parts of the country. With a more challenging macro-economic situation in 2020, when the country experienced its deepest recession in over 25 years, Nigeria has fewer buffers and policy instruments for mitigating adverse effects on its economy.²⁰ Government borrowing to finance budget deficits and capital projects has also risen sharply in recent years, constituting a significant debt burden to Nigeria,²¹ though its effects on stimulating economic growth with long-term potential are more difficult to discern. The ongoing currency crisis has contributed to a high rate of inflation and price hikes for food and other essentials, pushing many more Nigerians into poverty.²² Likewise, the economic effects of the national lockdown due to the pandemic have been severe on informal workers and daily wage earners who have no access to social protection from the state.²³

Globally, Nigeria ranked 161 out of 189 countries on the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), a drop from 152 out of 188 countries in 2016.²⁴ According to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics, 82.9 million Nigerians (or 40.1% of the total population) live in poverty, on less than US\$1.25 per day.²⁵ This figure is expected to increase to over 100 million people by 2022 as the economic impacts of Covid-19 and insecurity, against the backdrop of slow post-recession recovery, continue to squeeze household incomes and purchasing power.²⁶ Inequitable distribution persists, with GDP per capita in the north worth roughly half of that of the south, while the poverty rate in the north is 72% compared to 27% in the south and 35% in the Niger Delta.²⁷ The northeast has the highest rate of poverty of all regions in the country, caused by the ongoing violent insurgency.

Democratic deficits at all levels of government have stifled political participation, activism, free expression and accountable representation. Today, conflicts triggered by political, ethnic, religious or resource

allocation rivalries pose a significant threat to Nigeria's democracy and nationhood.²⁸ Many government institutions lack the capacity or will to engage with citizens or the private sector and deliver their mandates. Public officials charged to prescribe and implement policies to tackle development challenges are typically uninformed or uninterested, and thus the priorities of citizens get left behind.²⁹ This governance crisis is borne out of a democratic culture that accords less importance to the competence and antecedents of political leaders that occupy public office. These systemic challenges have bred an atmosphere of cynicism and mistrust between citizens and political leaders at all levels of government.³⁰

Systemic challenges have bred an atmosphere of cynicism and mistrust between citizens and political leaders

Furthermore, decades of unchecked corruption and poor investments have hollowed out public institutions and security actors, rendering them incapable of effectively providing basic services or neutralising threats to national security.³¹ In a recent report on the impact of corruption on Nigeria's economy, PricewaterhouseCoopers warned that corruption could cost Nigeria up to 37% of GDP by 2030, or around US\$1,000 per person, if not addressed immediately.³² Corruption in the judiciary and within anti-corruption agencies

continues to undermine the country's already weak systems of accountability, while brown envelope journalism and other types of media corruption undermine governance norms and public accountability. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, which are important agents of change, lack both the capacity and the resources to effectively engage or hold government accountable and to advocate for change.

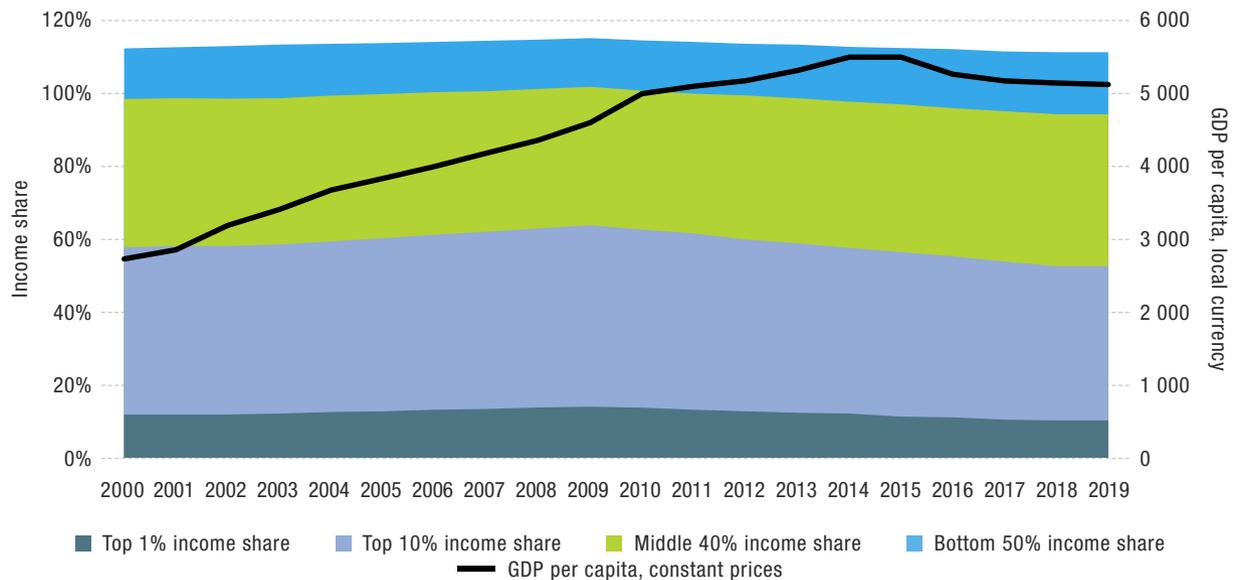
Unequal gains impede human development

Nigeria's oil and gas sector contributes almost two-thirds of the state's annual revenues. As such, the country's economic fortunes are highly vulnerable to energy prices. Yet, even in times of high oil prices, revenues have disproportionately favoured a small group of beneficiaries at the expense of broader society. Figure 1 shows that despite rising GDP per capita (right axis) across the last two decades, income inequality (left axis) has persisted. Through the oil boom, the portion of income captured by the top 1% and top 10% of earners increased slightly despite steep increases in GDP per capita. As such, economic growth has not made way for the type of inclusive development that is expected to advance the basic capabilities of society, increase economic agency and, ultimately consolidate sustained peace.

The impact that the inequitable dispensation of growth has on human development is unpacked next, before moving on to a discussion of its impacts on peace and stability.

SECTION THREE

FIGURE 1: Income inequality and GDP per capita



Source: World Inequality Database and World Economic Outlook

Economic exclusion also remains a central challenge in Nigeria. As of 2019, under-employment and unemployment figures stood at 28.6% and 27.1% respectively.³³ Unemployment, particularly affecting young people, rose to 33.3% in 2020 from 27.1% in 2019,³⁴ which represents a real risk for a country in which over 44% of its population of 200 million people are under 15 years old.³⁵ During this same period, foreign direct investment (FDI), which fuels business activity,³⁶ and aid assistance from multilateral agencies declined significantly. In 2020, various economic challenges, of which Covid-19 was the most notable, led to a 27% drop in government revenues, limiting the government's capacity to make capital investments³⁷ important for inclusive and human capital development. Against this backdrop, insecurity, economic turbulence and poor government response to these issues at all levels have created an

atmosphere primed for civil disobedience and exacerbated by widespread disillusionment and anger. The grievances and discontent felt by many young Nigerians due to the lack of employment prospects or opportunities for social mobility have driven protests for social and political reforms, and fuelled recruitment into criminal activity and violent extremism as a means of livelihood.

The fiscal impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have put severe pressure on Nigeria to promote critical investments. These include important systemic pathways to stability and peace, such as education, economic infrastructure, climate change reform, expanded health service provision and other similar social services. Millions of Nigerians lack access to essential services and social support. For a country with one of the fastest growing populations globally and estimated to reach 440 million people

by 2050,³⁸ Nigeria has some of the worst health outcomes in Africa. In 2020, budget spending on health to GDP was under 3.75% compared to the global average of 9% and 5% in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁹

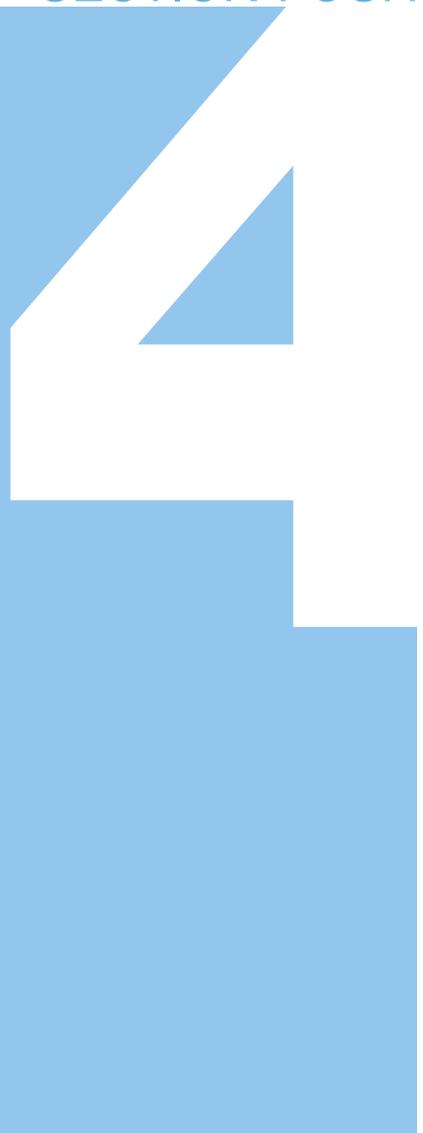
The spread of insecurity in parts of the country is radically undermining Nigeria's capacity to invest in human development

Over the decades, inadequate long-term investment in formal education has contributed to a literacy rate of 62% for Nigerians aged 15 and above.⁴⁰ The north, which has the lowest literacy rate at 29.7%, has the highest number of out-of-school children, estimated to be over 10 million.⁴¹ This situation creates fertile ground for

criminal or violent armed groups to exploit vulnerable and susceptible youths with poor literacy and underdeveloped critical thinking skills to join their cause, as is the case in northeast Nigeria.

The spread of insecurity in parts of the country is radically undermining Nigeria's capacity to invest in human development. Government cuts to crucial capital investments that foster human and economic development, under an already difficult economic climate, have been justified as necessary in order to comparatively increase security-related spending to secure vulnerable and affected populations, and address the scale of the insecurity facing Nigeria today. With a strained fiscus and persistent threats to national security, the trade-offs are difficult and unfortunately come at the expense of inclusive, human-centred development.

SECTION FOUR



IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

Violence and conflicts in Nigeria are often a result of complex intersecting issues, compounded by deficiencies in governance and equitable development. For instance, struggles over increasingly scarce and productive land and water resources have caused decades of instability and conflict in many states, especially in the northwest and north-central regions and, most recently, in the northeast. These conflicts, exacerbated by banditry, kidnapping and jihadist incursions, have prevented farmers, for instance, from accessing their lands, with the consequent effects on agricultural output and food security, food price inflation and poverty disproportionately affecting low-income households.

In addition, the explosion in criminal activity and armed groups across the country has disrupted commerce, diminished investors' confidence and drained state finances. Importantly, the vulnerabilities that stem from poor and unequal access to economic opportunities and social services that promote social mobility, particularly for young people, only compound the disillusionment that makes at-risk individuals ready targets

for recruitment into criminal or violent armed groups as a source of livelihood. The low opportunity cost for youths to join an extremist or criminal network continues to pose a significant risk to long-term stability.

Equally, widespread corruption and power abuses by state security actors are destabilising and compounding Nigeria's security challenges, especially in conflict hotspots. Extrajudicial violence, including physical abuse, secret detentions, forced disappearances, extortion and arbitrary arrests deployed by security forces against civilians,⁴² have created widespread mistrust, damaged relations and cooperation between security forces and civilian populations, and spurred some to join violent armed groups in a bid to retaliate against security forces for injustices suffered.

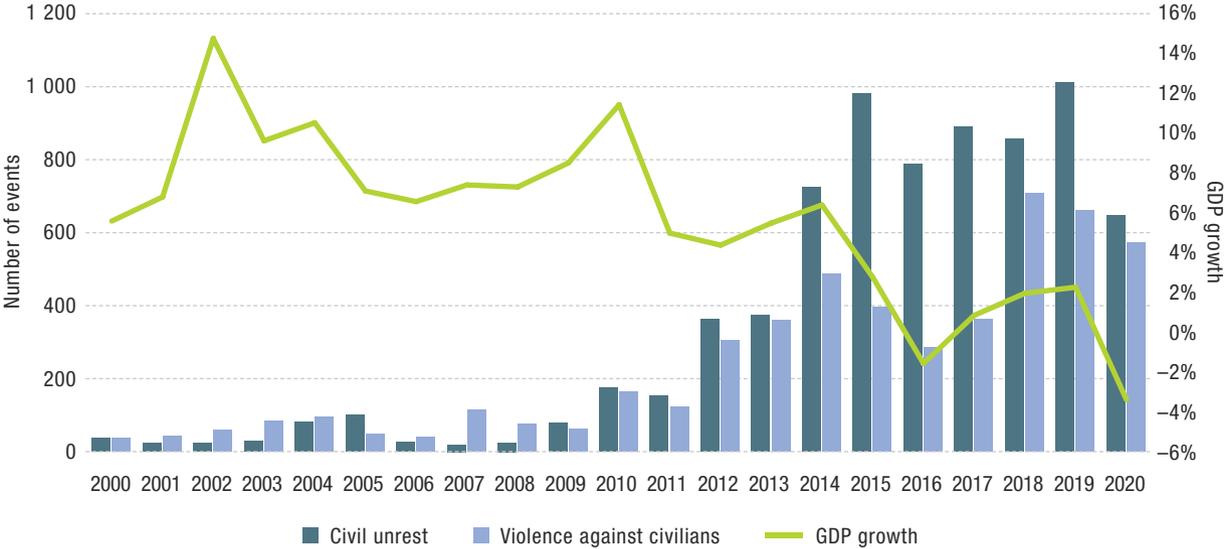
This relationship between social cohesion or stability and economic growth is reflected in Figure 2. Tracked on the left axis are incidents of social unrest (protests, riots and explosions) as well as violence against civilians from 2000 to the first half of 2020. The right axis tracks

SECTION FOUR

GDP growth. Following the impacts of the global financial crisis and declining oil prices, GDP growth took a knock from 2011 onwards. Around the same time, there was an increase in both civil unrest and violence against civilians. Such findings suggest that the decade of strong economic growth was not equitable and

thus failed to lay the foundations for human development to progress, leaving much of society vulnerable to economic shocks. With widespread vulnerability, economic downturns further erode trust, social cohesion and stability. Consequently, there has been a severe uptick in incidents of violence and civil unrest.

FIGURE 2: Social cohesion and GDP growth



Sources: World Economic Outlook and Armed Conflict Location and Events Data

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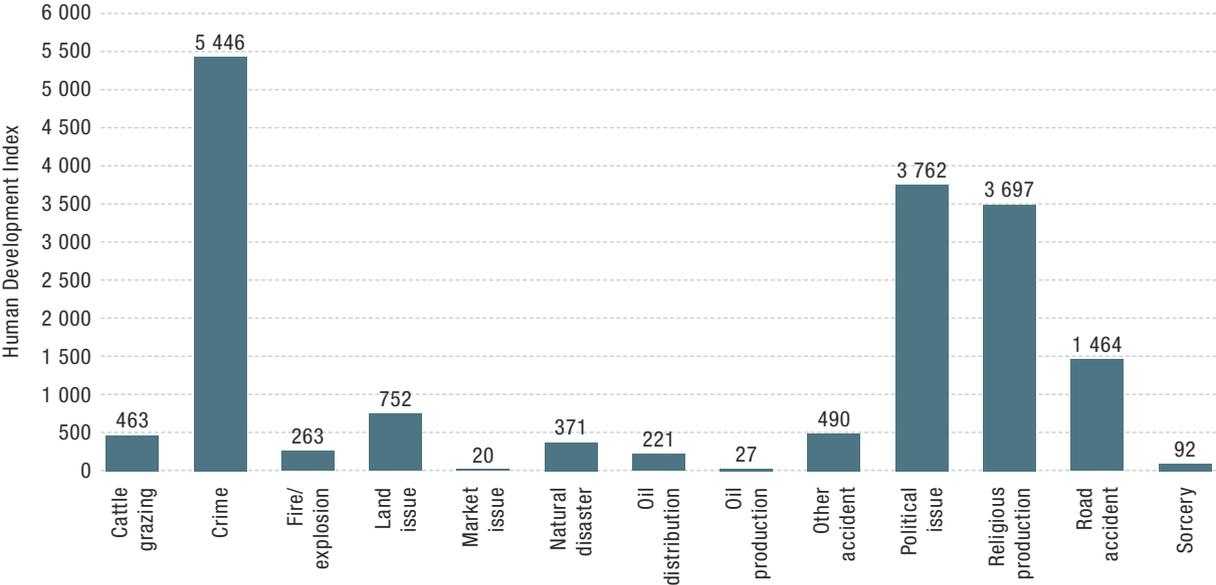
NIGERIA'S CONFLICT LANDSCAPE

According to a Nigeria Watch report (Figure 3), 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.⁴³

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 3: Main causes of violent deaths in 2020



Source: Nigeria Watch 2020 report, p. 8

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,⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ Figure 4 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.⁴⁷

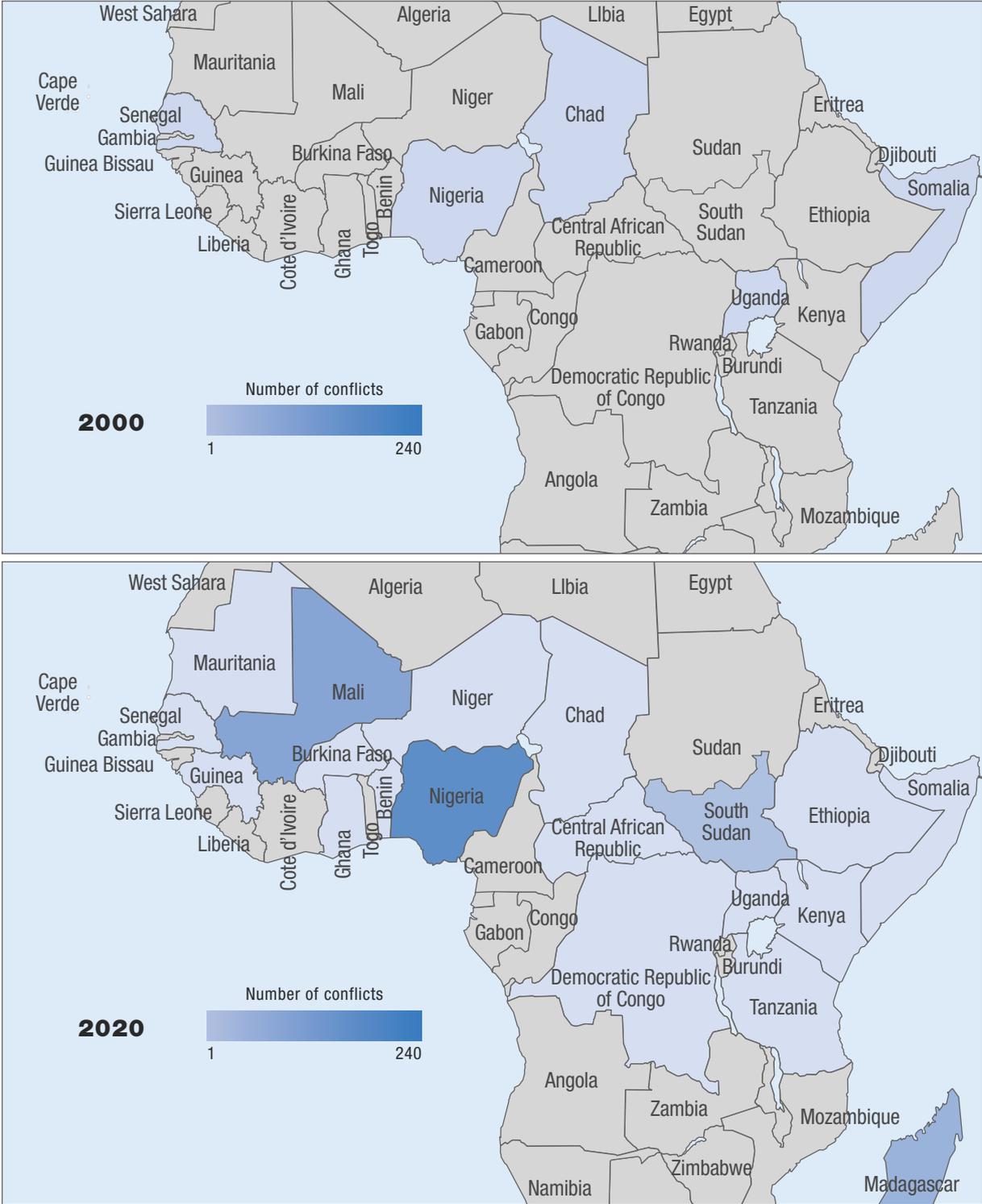
While farmer–pastoralist violence has primarily targeted men, it is women and children who often bear the brunt of the devastation created by violence, particularly in the hard-hit states of Kaduna, Benue and Plateau. Conflicts in the Middle Belt have centred on competition for natural resources, including 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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FIGURE 4: Pastoralist-related conflicts by country in 2000 and 2020



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

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.⁵⁰

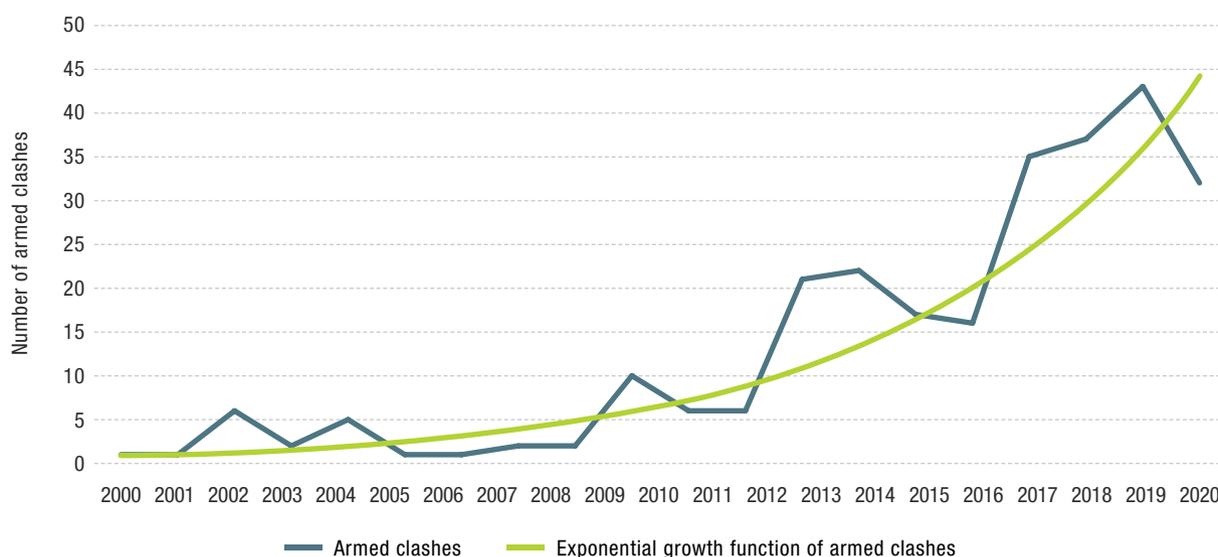
In the northwest, the new frontier of instability today, violent conflicts are caused by a number of complex and inter-related factors. Arms proliferation in the region and among pastoralists has resulted in an increase in armed clashes. Figure 5 shows this trend, with as many as 43 armed clashes recorded 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 4 and 5) 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.⁵¹ As security has deteriorated, the region has steadily come under the renewed influence of jihadist groups.⁵²

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ Large areas of farmlands remain uncultivated as farmers have abandoned their lands for fear of being attacked or kidnapped. These disruptions

FIGURE 5: 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

Local trade routes for transporting agricultural and non-food products have also become unsafe due to the activities of bandits and other criminal groups

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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ Oil pollution caused by equipment failure, vandalism and theft have destroyed fertile land and made traditional livelihoods tied to agriculture and fishing unviable.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² 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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ In addition, following a notice by northern groups

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.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸

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).⁶⁹ 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.

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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:

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*

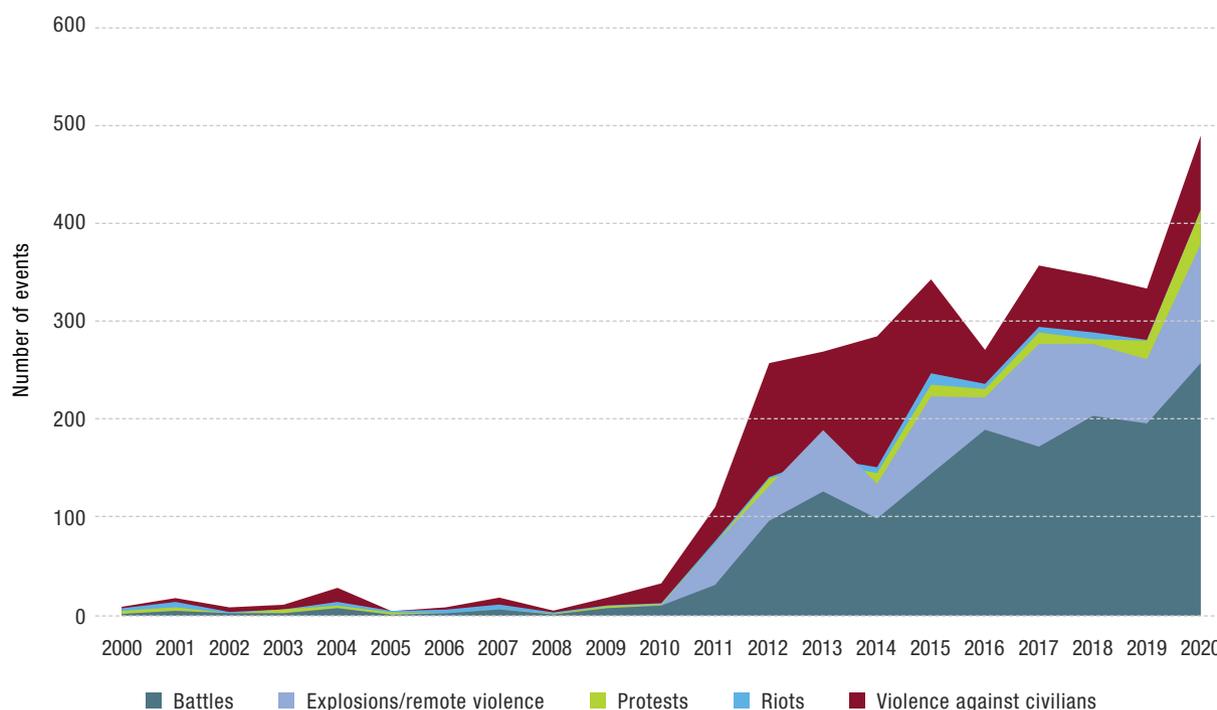
The government has not provided an enabling environment for the youth. When the youth have things to do, the community will progress.

*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 6 shows that since 2010 there has been a steep increase in the

FIGURE 6: Conflict events in Kano and Borno



Sources: ACLED

SECTION FIVE

number of battles, explosions and violence 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.⁷⁰

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 6) 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.⁷¹ 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

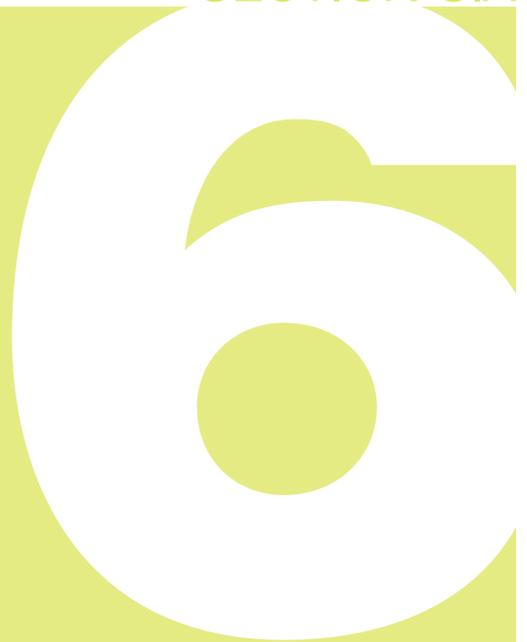
themselves in the face of the state's declining capacity to do so.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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

SECTION SIX



RE-WEAVING SOCIAL COHESION AND PEACE THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Since violence, conflict and peace all shape and are shaped by macro- and micro-economic dynamics, economic development policy, particularly for conflict-affected states, must take account of this and be designed to strengthen peace.⁷⁴ A minimum requirement in this regard should be that such strategies should be participatory and inclusive in order to counter the marginalisation that gives rise to discontent and radicalisation.

For Nigeria, however, economic development in isolation cannot achieve peace and stability. This is because peace is not just about the absence of violence or conflict. Rather, it is when people anticipate and manage their conflicts and differences without violence, while making equitable progress in their lives.⁷⁵ Economic development must thus encompass democratic, transparent and accountable systems of governance, a vibrant and empowered civil society, rule of law that incorporates the protection of human rights for all, and equal access to opportunities, services and support, to achieve sustainable peace that benefits all Nigerians.

Crucially also, Nigeria must now begin to respond constructively to the challenge of structural violence which validates harm, including unprovoked violence against minority or marginalised groups. Failing to do so legitimises other forms of violence. For example, score settling and reprisal attacks in the case of farmer–pastoralist conflicts, which encourages more violence, resulting from past experiences, reinforces the idea that justice for the victims of violence is unattainable.⁷⁶ Such unfairness erodes resilience and undermines stability while also contributing to growing unemployment and low economic investments that support human development.

Fierce competition over access to scarce economic or natural resources is a key contributory factor to violence and conflicts in Nigeria. This is especially aggravated when livelihoods are based on environmentally damaging practices such as illegal mining or overgrazing. As such, long-term peace and stability within and between groups would really only be possible when people have fair access to opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods, combined with general well-

being, justice and security, within a context of representative and accountable governance.

Progressing human development is at the heart of this, and local residents in Borno and Kano echo the growing urgency for this need to be met. Part of this is understanding what local communities perceive as important to their own development. This ensures ownership and buy-in. Through consultations, residents in Borno and Kano overwhelmingly indicated that centres for skills development would be vital to addressing the crisis of idle youth. This requires urgent attention as the ongoing youth crisis is laying the grounds for Boko Haram recruitment and broader violence within communities.

Another need expressed by local communities is for small business capital or financing, as well as skills development to run businesses. In addition, there is a call for skilled community members to mentor youth through apprenticeships and skills transfer initiatives. If programmes of this nature encourage inter-ethnic learning opportunities, this will promote greater interdependence between ethnic groups, which can contribute to broader social cohesion. These conditions would address the grievances and vulnerabilities that lead to violence and would also increase the opportunity cost for groups and communities to engage in violence.

With collaboration among stakeholders – community leaders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international development agencies – it is important for government to stimulate market-driven economic development that is collectivist in nature and linked to negotiated off-take

agreements with the private sector.⁷⁷ This limits competition over economic resources, such as water and arable land, and ensures sustainability for economic development efforts. Such an approach is essential because people will abide by arrangements if they produce incentives that do not undermine their economic survival.

Residents in Borno and Kano overwhelmingly indicated that centres for skills development would be vital to addressing the crisis of idle youth

In the context of mitigating farmer–herder conflicts, integrated agricultural sector economic development projects should be considered for their potential to transform conflict systems. An example would be to support women and youths to set up small-scale value chain businesses that convert agricultural crop waste into cattle feed, while providing access to affordable loans and technical assistance to small-scale farmers to improve yields on smaller parcels of farmland, which can then provide more grazing land for pastoralists.

Drawing from the key drivers of recruitment to violence, strengthening the private sector will be essential. The private sector is vital for creating jobs, improving the population's purchasing power, stimulating local economies and promoting investments that fuel business expansion. It also tends to recover faster than public sector initiatives following conflict.⁷⁸ It is therefore important

for government to incentivise private sector development in post-conflict settings by creating the enabling business environment that encourages sustained investment and economic growth and strengthens local enterprises to create jobs and stimulate the economy. Direct government support can come in the form of economic infrastructure development, improved security architecture, better technical education investments to prepare the local workforce, and tax breaks for manufacturers that relocate their operations to conflict-affected parts of the country. Private sector development can have a positive impact in post-conflict situations if implemented in a way that is sensitive and addresses contextual social, economic and political characteristics with a focus on marginalised groups whose grievances can be manipulated by insurgent or violent groups.

To fight corruption, which significantly encumbers development and governance outcomes for Nigerians, it is crucial to address the lack of transparency of critical financial and other information that is fundamental to economic development. This includes greater transparency over budgets and revenues; strengthening

institutional capacity, processes and systems that block leakages and opportunities for corruption; and providing incentives that increase the political will to tackle impunity, holding public officers accountable and punishing those that are complicit in corruption.

Technology can enable government to achieve these objectives by building digital platforms to manage government finances, promote personnel integrity, and create transparency in key risk areas of government operations such as procurement and contract negotiations. Combining these efforts with a strong and independent audit system, backed by a well-resourced judiciary, would move Nigeria forward in combatting pervasive administrative, political and grand corruption.⁷⁹ To support this, an environment that enables strong and accountable civil society organisations to provide government oversight is crucial. Ultimately, what is most important is a policy thrust by government, backed by a sound strategy that prioritises 'long term, high return institution building activities', coupled with the justice infrastructure and political will to hold those that transgress accountable.⁸⁰

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 subsidies, 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.

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.
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.
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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