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Anatomy of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Strategies for Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT: Insecurity has remained one of the most persistent threats to human security, governance and sustainable development in Northern Nigeria. The region has experienced multiple and interconnected forms of violence, including terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, communal violence, cattle rustling, illegal mining-related violence and other forms of organised criminality. This paper examined the anatomy of insecurity in Northern Nigeria by analysing its major causes, consequences and strategies for sustainable peacebuilding. The study adopted a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis of relevant scholarly publications and other secondary sources. The literature was reviewed thematically around the drivers, manifestations and consequences of insecurity, as well as the effectiveness of existing responses and prospects for peacebuilding. The analysis revealed that insecurity in Northern Nigeria was not attributable to a single factor but resulted from the interaction of governance deficits, poverty, unemployment, political marginalisation, institutional weakness, proliferation of small arms, porous borders, environmental pressures, competition over resources, illegal mining and weak justice systems. The consequences included loss of lives and livelihoods, population displacement, food insecurity, destruction of infrastructure, disruption of education and healthcare, economic decline, psychological trauma and erosion of public confidence in government. The paper argued that predominantly military responses had been insufficient because they addressed the manifestations of violence without adequately transforming its structural foundations. It therefore advocated an integrated peacebuilding approach based on accountable governance, security-sector reform, community participation, youth employment, rural development, effective justice systems, conflict-sensitive resource management, regional cooperation and victim-centred recovery. The paper concluded that sustainable peace in Northern Nigeria required a transition from predominantly reactive security management to preventive, people-centred and development-oriented peacebuilding.

Keywords: insecurity, Northern Nigeria, armed banditry, terrorism, governance, human security, peacebuilding, conflict, development

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has constituted one of the most serious challenges to Nigeria's political stability, human security and socioeconomic development. Although insecurity has occurred in different parts of the country, Northern Nigeria has experienced particularly persistent and interconnected forms of violent conflict. These have included Boko Haram

insurgency and terrorism in the North-East, armed banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, farmer-herder conflicts across several states, communal violence, cattle rustling, illegal mining-related violence and other forms of organised criminality.

The character of insecurity in Northern Nigeria has evolved considerably. What were previously perceived largely as isolated communal disputes, cattle rustling or conventional criminal activities have increasingly developed into complex systems of organised violence. Armed groups have exploited weak governance, difficult terrain, porous borders, illicit economies and limited state presence to establish and sustain operational spaces. Mikail et al. (2025) observed that rural banditry had become a major threat to human security, while Olasupo et al. (2024) identified socioeconomic deprivation, institutional weaknesses and failures in governmental responses as important dimensions of the banditry crisis.

The complexity of the problem makes it inadequate to examine Northern Nigerian insecurity exclusively from a military perspective. Insecurity has simultaneously represented a security, political, economic, social and developmental problem. Violence has affected agricultural production, education, healthcare, investment, livelihoods and social cohesion. It has also weakened the capacity of government institutions and reduced citizens' confidence in the state's ability to provide protection and justice. Ojewale (2024) described the situation in North-West Nigeria as a polycrisis of governance in which insecurity and governance failures reinforced one another. In this situation, weak governance created conditions that enabled armed groups to operate, while persistent violence further weakened the institutions responsible for providing security and public services.

The central argument of this paper was that insecurity in Northern Nigeria was best understood as a multidimensional governance and human-security crisis. Although armed groups constituted an important component of the problem, the persistence and expansion of insecurity were also associated with structural inequality, institutional weakness, socioeconomic deprivation, political exclusion, weak public services and limited state capacity. The paper therefore examined the causes, consequences and responses to insecurity in Northern Nigeria. It further proposed strategies for sustainable peacebuilding based on the understanding that durable peace requires simultaneous attention to security, governance, justice, livelihoods, social cohesion and development.

Conceptualizing Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

Insecurity refers to conditions in which individuals, communities and institutions are exposed to persistent threats to their lives, property, livelihoods, dignity and general wellbeing. The concept extends beyond physical violence to include economic, political, social, environmental, food and health vulnerabilities. From a human-security perspective, a society cannot be regarded as secure merely because armed attacks have declined. Individuals must also have reasonable access to livelihoods, healthcare, education, food, justice and personal safety.

Northern Nigeria illustrates this multidimensional character of insecurity. In the North-East, terrorism and insurgency have resulted in prolonged displacement, destruction of communities and disruption of economic and social activities. In the North-West, armed banditry has involved kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids, extortion and attacks on rural populations. These activities have threatened not only physical security but also livelihoods, food

production and community resilience (Mikail et al., 2025; Olasupo et al., 2024).

The various forms of insecurity have also demonstrated significant areas of interaction. Criminal networks have exploited conditions created by insurgency, weak border controls and illicit economies. The circulation of weapons, criminal networks and financial resources across local and international boundaries has further complicated the security environment. The concept of the anatomy of insecurity therefore refers to the structure and interaction of the factors, actors and processes through which insecurity emerges, expands and reproduces itself. This perspective shifts attention away from individual violent incidents towards the broader political, socioeconomic and institutional conditions that sustain violence.

Causes and Anatomy of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

1. **Governance Deficit and Institutional Weakness:** Governance deficit constituted one of the major structural drivers of insecurity in Northern Nigeria. In many rural communities, citizens had limited access to effective government institutions, justice, public infrastructure and reliable security services. This created a gap between the formal authority of the state and citizens' everyday experiences. Ojewale (2024) argued that contemporary banditry in the North-West was enabled by interrelated governance deficits. Inadequate public services, weak institutional presence and limited accountability created conditions in which criminal groups could expand their influence. Where the state failed to provide effective security and justice, communities increasingly relied on informal authorities, vigilante groups and other non-state actors. Although such mechanisms sometimes provided immediate protection, they could also contribute to fragmented authority and weaken the legitimacy of formal institutions.
2. **Poverty and Socioeconomic Deprivation:** Poverty represented another important structural condition associated with insecurity. Many rural communities in Northern Nigeria experienced limited access to productive employment, social services and sustainable economic opportunities. Such conditions increased vulnerability, particularly among young people. Olasupo et al. (2024) identified poverty and unemployment among the factors associated with the persistence of banditry. Nkwede and Nwogbaga (2017) similarly linked violent conflict to broader challenges of socioeconomic development. However, poverty alone could not adequately explain participation in violent activities. Large numbers of poor Nigerians had not participated in criminality. Poverty became particularly significant when it interacted with social exclusion, unemployment, weak institutions, access to weapons and opportunities for illicit economic gain.
3. **Youth Unemployment and Vulnerability:** Youth unemployment and underemployment represented important peace and security concerns. Young people without access to legitimate economic opportunities could become vulnerable to recruitment into criminal and violent networks. The problem was particularly important in rural communities where vocational training, formal employment and productive enterprises were limited. Consequently, youth empowerment needed to be understood not simply as a development intervention but also as a preventive security and peacebuilding strategy. Obi (2021) emphasised the relevance of youth empowerment to peacebuilding in

conflict-affected communities. Sustainable employment opportunities could reduce vulnerability to recruitment while strengthening young people's stake in peaceful community development.

4. **Political Marginalisation and Exclusion:** Political exclusion contributed to perceptions of injustice, alienation and neglect. Communities that perceived themselves as excluded from political decision-making or deprived of equitable access to public resources could develop distrust towards government institutions. Akinola (2018) demonstrated the close relationship between political economy, security and development in Nigeria. In this context, insecurity could not be completely separated from questions concerning access to political power, public resources and socioeconomic opportunities. Inclusive governance therefore required equitable representation, transparent allocation of resources, responsiveness to community grievances and equal application of the law.
5. **Weak Security and Justice Institutions:** Weaknesses within security and justice institutions contributed significantly to the persistence of insecurity. Inadequate personnel, insufficient equipment, intelligence gaps, poor inter-agency coordination, difficult terrain and limited logistical capacity could undermine the effectiveness of security operations. The justice system also played an important role. Where perpetrators were rarely prosecuted or convicted, the deterrent effect of the law became weakened. Persistent impunity could therefore encourage further violence. The continued occurrence of armed attacks despite repeated military operations suggested that kinetic interventions alone had not addressed the institutional and socioeconomic conditions that enabled violent groups to regenerate.
6. **Porous Borders and Transnational Criminal Networks:** Northern Nigeria shares international borders with Niger, Chad and Cameroon. These extensive border areas have created opportunities for the movement of people, weapons, livestock, drugs and other illicit commodities. The wider Sahelian security environment has also facilitated the movement and interaction of criminal and extremist networks. Consequently, insecurity in Northern Nigeria cannot be addressed exclusively through domestic measures. Effective border management and regional cooperation are necessary components of a comprehensive response. Thompson (2023) highlighted the relationship between illicit activities, borderland insecurity and responses in Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of examining insecurity within its wider regional context.
7. **Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons:** The availability and circulation of small arms and light weapons have increased the lethality of conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Disputes that might previously have been resolved through negotiation or traditional mediation can escalate rapidly when firearms are readily available. Arms proliferation has also increased the organisational capacity of criminal groups and enabled them to conduct coordinated attacks. Effective responses therefore require stronger border controls, arms tracing, weapons recovery and regional cooperation.
8. **Farmer-Herder Conflict and Resource Competition:** Competition over land, water and grazing routes has contributed to violent conflicts in several northern communities. Population growth, environmental degradation, changing land-use patterns and climate-related

pressures have intensified competition over scarce resources. Farmer-herder conflict and banditry should not be treated as identical phenomena. However, they can interact through displacement, retaliatory attacks, loss of livelihoods and weakened community relations. Effective conflict prevention therefore requires functional mechanisms for managing land and resource disputes before they escalate into violence.

9. **Illegal Mining and Conflict Economies:** Illegal mining has contributed to the emergence of conflict economies in parts of Northern Nigeria. Valuable mineral resources can provide financial opportunities for criminal groups and other actors who exploit insecurity for economic gain. This dimension is important because some individuals and networks may have economic incentives to sustain insecurity. Consequently, peacebuilding must address not only armed actors but also the financial structures that make violence profitable.
10. **Poorly Governed Rural and Forest Areas:** Remote forests and poorly governed rural areas have provided operational advantages to armed groups. Difficult terrain, inadequate surveillance and limited government presence have made some locations difficult for conventional security forces to monitor continuously. The problem was therefore not the existence of forests themselves but the absence of effective governance, surveillance and community protection mechanisms within vulnerable areas.

Consequences of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

1. **Loss of Lives and Physical Security:** The most immediate consequence of insecurity has been the loss of human lives. Communities have experienced killings, kidnapping, physical assault, sexual violence and other forms of harm. Persistent violence has also generated widespread fear and restricted the ability of citizens to engage freely in economic and social activities.
2. **Population Displacement:** Violence has displaced households and communities from their homes and places of livelihood. Displaced persons have often lost houses, farmland, livestock, businesses and social networks. The consequences of displacement have extended beyond the immediate victims because host communities have also experienced increased pressure on land, housing, healthcare, education and other public services. Aliyu (2023) demonstrated the broader socioeconomic and policy implications of displacement in North-East Nigeria.
3. **Food Insecurity:** Agriculture has remained a major source of livelihood in Northern Nigeria. Insecurity has prevented farmers from accessing their farms, disrupted markets and reduced agricultural production. Olasupo et al. (2024) identified food insecurity and livelihood disruption as consequences of banditry. This created a vicious cycle in which insecurity reduced agricultural productivity, declining livelihoods increased vulnerability, and socioeconomic vulnerability further weakened community resilience.
4. **Disruption of Education:** Insecurity has disrupted educational activities through attacks on schools, kidnapping, displacement and fear among parents and students. Prolonged school closures and reduced attendance have serious implications for human-capital development. Children in rural and conflict-affected communities have been particularly vulnerable because they already faced limited educational

opportunities before the escalation of insecurity.

5. **Economic Disruption:** Insecurity has adversely affected agriculture, trade, transportation, investment and local businesses. Farmers have abandoned productive land, traders have faced increased risks and investors have become less willing to operate in insecure communities. Consequently, insecurity has generated significant economic opportunity costs. Public resources that could have been invested in infrastructure and social services have increasingly been required for emergency security and humanitarian responses.
6. **Destruction of Infrastructure:** Schools, healthcare facilities, roads, markets, houses and other public and private infrastructure have been damaged or abandoned in conflict-affected areas. The destruction of infrastructure has further reduced government capacity to provide essential services. This has produced a reinforcing cycle in which insecurity destroys development infrastructure, while weak infrastructure subsequently increases community vulnerability.
7. **Psychological Trauma:** Victims and survivors of violence have experienced grief, fear, anxiety, trauma and loss of social confidence. Children exposed to repeated violence have faced particularly serious psychological and developmental risks. Consequently, peacebuilding programmes need to incorporate psychosocial support, trauma recovery and community healing alongside physical reconstruction.
8. **Erosion of State Legitimacy:** One of the most significant political consequences of insecurity has been the erosion of citizens' confidence in government. When communities repeatedly experience violence without adequate protection, perceptions of state incapacity and abandonment may increase. Ojewale (2024) demonstrated the mutually reinforcing relationship between insecurity and governance failure. Persistent insecurity can weaken state legitimacy, while weak state legitimacy can make communities more vulnerable to alternative forms of authority and criminal control.

Assessment of Existing Responses

1. **Military and Kinetic Responses:** The Nigerian government has relied substantially on military and other security operations to confront terrorism and banditry. Such operations have remained necessary where armed groups have posed immediate threats to civilian populations. However, the persistence of insecurity has demonstrated the limitations of relying predominantly on kinetic approaches. Military operations can disrupt armed groups without necessarily eliminating the socioeconomic, political and institutional conditions that facilitate recruitment and regeneration. The continued recurrence of attacks has therefore reinforced the argument that military intervention should constitute only one component of a broader security and peacebuilding framework.
2. **Negotiation and Amnesty:** Dialogue, negotiation and amnesty have also been employed as mechanisms for reducing violence. Such measures can be useful where they are carefully designed and linked to disarmament, reintegration and community reconciliation. However, poorly designed agreements may create incentives for further criminality, particularly when armed groups perceive violence as a pathway to political recognition or material rewards. Negotiation should therefore be conditional, transparent, monitored and

integrated into broader peacebuilding processes.

3. **Community Vigilantism:** Community-based security initiatives have emerged partly because formal security institutions have not always been able to provide adequate protection. Local communities possess valuable knowledge of local actors, terrain and emerging threats. However, unregulated vigilantism can produce human-rights abuses, revenge attacks and further escalation. Community security structures should therefore operate within clear legal, institutional and accountability frameworks.
4. **Humanitarian and Development Interventions:** Humanitarian programmes have provided essential assistance to displaced persons and other victims of violence. However, humanitarian assistance alone cannot eliminate the structural causes of insecurity. Development interventions therefore need to move beyond short-term relief towards livelihood recovery, institutional strengthening, rural development and community resilience.

Strategies for Sustainable Peacebuilding

1) **Strengthening Democratic and Local Governance:** Effective governance should constitute the foundation of sustainable peacebuilding. Governments should strengthen institutional capacity, transparency, accountability and service delivery, particularly in rural communities. Local governments should be adequately positioned to identify emerging conflicts, coordinate community development and facilitate access to basic public services. Responsive governance can improve citizens' trust in government and reduce opportunities for non-state actors to exploit institutional weaknesses.
2) **Security-Sector Reform:** Security institutions should be strengthened through improved intelligence gathering, personnel training, logistics, inter-agency coordination and civilian protection. Security-sector reform should also emphasise accountability. Security institutions are more likely to obtain community cooperation when citizens trust them and believe that misconduct will be investigated and sanctioned.
3) **Community-Based Peacebuilding:** Peacebuilding should involve local communities rather than being designed exclusively at federal or state levels. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, women, youth, civil society organisations and community associations possess valuable knowledge about local grievances and conflict dynamics. Ibrahim and Yandaki (2020) emphasised the potential contribution of local mediation practices to peacebuilding in Nigeria. Such mechanisms should therefore be strengthened while ensuring that they remain consistent with constitutional rights and protections for vulnerable groups.
4) **Youth Employment and Economic Empowerment:** Youth empowerment should be integrated into the security agenda. Governments should expand sustainable opportunities in agriculture, vocational training, entrepreneurship, digital skills and small-business development. The objective should be to create durable livelihoods rather than short-term interventions that provide temporary relief without changing the socioeconomic conditions that increase vulnerability.
5) **Rural Development:** Government should prioritise rural roads, schools, healthcare facilities, water supply, agricultural extension services, communication infrastructure and local markets. Rural development can contribute to peacebuilding by increasing state

presence, expanding legitimate economic opportunities and strengthening the relationship between communities and government.

6) **Conflict-Sensitive Natural Resource Management:** Land, water, forests and mineral resources should be managed transparently and equitably. Mechanisms for resolving farmer-herder disputes should be strengthened before disagreements escalate into violence. Mining activities should also be effectively regulated to prevent mineral resources from becoming sources of financing for criminal organisations.
7) **Border Security and Regional Cooperation:** Nigeria should strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries through intelligence sharing, coordinated border patrols, arms-control measures and joint efforts against transnational criminal networks. Because insecurity crosses national borders, domestic security measures alone cannot adequately address the regional dimensions of the crisis.
8) **Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration:** Appropriate disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes should be developed for individuals who genuinely renounce violence. Such programmes should combine vocational training, psychosocial assistance, community reconciliation and post-reintegration monitoring. However, reintegration programmes should not substitute for justice. Individuals responsible for serious crimes should remain subject to appropriate legal processes.
9) **Victim-Centred Peacebuilding:** Victims should occupy a central position in peacebuilding programmes. Compensation, psychosocial support, livelihood assistance, reconstruction and access to justice should be incorporated into recovery programmes. Peace processes that focus exclusively on armed groups while neglecting victims may deepen grievances and weaken reconciliation.
10) **Early-Warning and Early-Response Mechanisms:** Effective early-warning mechanisms should be developed at community, local government, state and national levels. Such mechanisms should integrate information from community leaders, security agencies, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders. Early warning should be connected to early response. Information about emerging conflicts has limited value if institutions are unable or unwilling to act promptly.

An Integrated Peacebuilding Framework for Northern Nigeria

The findings of the study suggested the need for an integrated peacebuilding framework consisting of five mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. **Security.** The state should protect citizens from immediate threats through professional, coordinated and accountable security institutions.
2. **Governance.** Public institutions should become more accessible, responsive and legitimate, particularly at the local level.
3. **Development.** Poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure and economic exclusion should be addressed through sustained rural development and human-capital investment.
4. **Justice and reconciliation.** Victims should have access to justice, compensation and psychosocial support, while carefully designed dialogue and reintegration mechanisms should be available to appropriate former combatants.
5. **Community ownership.** Local communities should participate actively in identifying conflicts, designing

interventions, implementing peacebuilding programmes and monitoring outcomes.

The five pillars should not be treated as independent interventions. Their effectiveness would depend on their coordination. Security without development could suppress violence temporarily without addressing its causes. Development without security could be undermined by continued attacks. Governance without justice could fail to restore public confidence. Peacebuilding without community ownership could lack local legitimacy. An integrated approach was therefore considered essential to breaking the cycle through which insecurity, poverty, weak governance and underdevelopment reinforce one another.

Theoretical Framework

The human-security perspective provided the principal framework for understanding insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Unlike traditional security approaches that place greater emphasis on the protection of the state and its territorial integrity, the human-security perspective focuses on the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity.

The relevance of this perspective was evident in Northern Nigeria, where insecurity affected not only physical safety but also food security, education, healthcare, employment, housing and social relationships. The destruction of farms and markets, displacement of households and disruption of public services demonstrated that insecurity had become a development crisis as well as a security crisis.

Mikail et al. (2025) showed that rural banditry had significant implications for human security in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, Aliyu (2023) demonstrated that displacement associated with conflict in North-East Nigeria had significant socioeconomic and public-policy implications. The human-security perspective was therefore useful because it broadened the meaning of security beyond military protection and placed the welfare and dignity of affected populations at the centre of analysis.

Governance Perspective

The governance perspective complemented the human-security approach by explaining how institutional weaknesses created opportunities for violent and criminal actors. Where government institutions were absent, ineffective or perceived as illegitimate, non-state actors could exploit institutional gaps. Ojewale (2024) demonstrated that governance deficits in North-West Nigeria interacted with insecurity to create a cycle in which weak governance facilitated banditry while banditry further weakened governance. Similarly, Muhammad et al. (2026) linked governance deficits to the proliferation of armed banditry in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States.

The governance perspective therefore suggested that strengthening the capacity, legitimacy, responsiveness and accountability of public institutions should constitute an essential component of any long-term strategy for addressing insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis. Relevant information was obtained from scholarly journal articles, books, book chapters and other secondary materials dealing with insecurity, armed banditry, terrorism, governance, conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. The literature was reviewed thematically around four major areas: the causes of insecurity, manifestations of insecurity, consequences of insecurity, and strategies for peacebuilding. The study did not generate primary quantitative data; rather, it synthesised existing literature to provide an

integrated understanding of the insecurity crisis in Northern Nigeria. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring issues, explanations and policy concerns across the reviewed literature. The approach was considered appropriate because the insecurity crisis involved multiple actors, institutions, grievances and socioeconomic conditions that could not adequately be explained through a single-variable analysis.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrated that insecurity in Northern Nigeria was multidimensional and structurally embedded. The evidence did not support explanations that attributed insecurity exclusively to poverty, religion, ethnicity, climate change, political manipulation or weak security institutions. Rather, these factors interacted in complex ways.

For instance, poverty could increase vulnerability, but poverty alone did not produce banditry or terrorism. Weak governance could create opportunities for criminal groups, but institutional weakness became more damaging when combined with weapons availability, illicit markets and political exclusion. Similarly, environmental pressures could intensify competition over land and water, but violent escalation was also influenced by the availability of weapons and the effectiveness of conflict-management institutions.

This interconnectedness explained why single-dimensional interventions had frequently produced limited results. Military operations could eliminate or disperse individual combatants without dismantling the socioeconomic networks that facilitated recruitment. Amnesty could temporarily reduce violence without eliminating the economic incentives associated with criminality. Development programmes could improve livelihoods but produce limited security gains where communities remained physically vulnerable. The insecurity crisis was therefore best understood as a self-reinforcing cycle. Governance failures created vulnerabilities; vulnerabilities generated opportunities for violent and criminal mobilisation; violence destroyed livelihoods and institutions; institutional destruction further weakened state capacity; and declining state legitimacy increased dependence on informal and non-state actors.

Breaking this cycle required a shift from conflict suppression to conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Conflict suppression focused primarily on reducing immediate violence, whereas peacebuilding addressed the relationships, institutions and structural conditions that reproduced violence. The findings therefore supported the argument that sustainable peace in Northern Nigeria required an integrated approach that combined security, governance, justice, economic opportunity, social reconciliation and community participation.

CONCLUSION

The anatomy of insecurity in Northern Nigeria revealed a complex interaction among governance deficits, poverty, unemployment, political exclusion, weak security institutions, resource competition, environmental pressures, porous borders, illicit economies and the proliferation of arms. Terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict and communal violence should therefore be understood as interconnected manifestations of a broader human-security and governance crisis. The consequences have been extensive. Insecurity has resulted in loss of lives and livelihoods, population displacement, food insecurity, disruption of education and healthcare, destruction of infrastructure,

economic decline and erosion of public confidence in government. It has also weakened social cohesion and generated high psychological and humanitarian costs.

The analysis further demonstrated that military operations alone were insufficient to produce sustainable peace. Although military and police interventions remained necessary for protecting communities and confronting heavily armed groups, they needed to be complemented by governance reform, rural development, youth empowerment, justice, community-based peacebuilding, regional cooperation and victim-centred recovery.

The central policy implication is that Nigeria should move from a predominantly reactive security model towards an integrated human-security and peacebuilding framework**.** Such an approach should simultaneously secure communities, strengthen institutions, expand legitimate economic opportunities, address structural inequalities, regulate conflict economies and empower local actors. Sustainable peace in Northern Nigeria will ultimately depend not only on reducing the operational capacity of armed groups but also on transforming the political, economic and institutional conditions that make violence attractive, profitable and sustainable. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Governments should strengthen accountable governance and security institutions by improving institutional capacity, intelligence gathering, inter-agency coordination, logistics, transparency, civilian accountability and public-service delivery, particularly in vulnerable rural communities.
2. Youth empowerment and rural development should be prioritised through sustainable employment, vocational training, agriculture, entrepreneurship, improved infrastructure, healthcare, education, water supply and access to markets, thereby reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities that may facilitate recruitment into violent groups.
3. Community-centred peacebuilding and justice mechanisms should be strengthened by involving traditional rulers, religious leaders, women, youth and civil society organisations in early-warning, conflict prevention and mediation, while providing victims with compensation, psychosocial support, livelihood assistance and access to justice.
4. Regional and preventive security measures should be integrated into peacebuilding efforts through stronger border cooperation, action against illegal mining, kidnapping, arms trafficking and other conflict economies, alongside disarmament and reintegration programmes and effective early-warning and early-response systems.

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