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COMPLEXITIES OF HUMAN SECURITY IN CONFLICT ZONES IDP CAMPS IN BENUE STATE: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF VULNERABILITIES, RESILIENCE, AND PEACEBUILDING STRATEGIES

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Abstract
The protracted insecurity across the North central states of Nigeria, most particularly Benue State has resulted in humanitarian emergency, hence, the associated consequences with Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the state. This paper presents a phenomenological study designed to explore the intricate dynamics of human security in conflict zones, with a specific focus on vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies adopted toward mitigating the crisis. Qualitative research methods were employed to provide an in-depth understanding of these interconnected themes from the perspectives of participants. The study conducted Semi-structured interviews with informants selected from conflict-ridden Guma Local Government Area in Benue State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling approach ensured representation from various demographics and backgrounds, capturing diverse experiences of IDPs in the focal local council. Two IDP camps, Dauda Camp I and Gbajimba Camp were selected in gathering data on vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies. Four key informants were purposively chosen from each camp. focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions of vulnerabilities and human security, peacebuilding strategies, and recommendations for enhancing security and peacebuilding efforts within the conflict zones. The results revealed nuanced insights into the complexities of human security in conflict zones, emphasising the interconnected relationships between vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies. The study recommends that policy makers need to come up with a clear-cut targeted interventions programme for vulnerable populations, with focus on women and children.

Key Words: Human security, IDP camps, vulnerabilities, resilience, peacebuilding

1. Introduction

In recent times, the global stage has witnessed a concerning rise in conflicts and humanitarian crises, leading to the displacement of millions and their resettlement in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps across numerous states within the federation and the globe (Mohammed, 2022). The surge in armed conflicts globally has resulted in an astronomical number of individuals seeking refuge in IDP camps, underscoring the need to address the unique challenges faced by these communities. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced persons reached an unprecedented 82.4 million by the end of 2020 (UNHCR, 2021). The challenges faced by those in these camps goes beyond physical displacement, posing threats to their human security, defined as protection from threats to lives, livelihoods, and dignity, especially in conflict zones and IDP camps.

Displacement, particularly in conflict zones, introduces a complex array of vulnerabilities that require thorough examination. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by individuals in IDP camps, focusing on the interconnection between human security, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies. Through qualitative exploration, this research seeks to interrogate the complexities shaping the experiences of those affected by conflict and forced displacement. Conflict zones not only pose immediate threats to physical safety of the people but also erodes social structures, economic stability, and community fabric (Väyrynen, 2023). Within IDP camps, individuals grapple with heightened vulnerabilities, including inadequate access to basic necessities like food, clean water, healthcare, and education. The breakdown of social cohesion and traditional support systems intensifies these challenges, impacting on the psychological and emotional well-being of IDP communities (Akilova, Borh, & Marzouk, 2022).

Amid these vulnerabilities, the concept of resilience emerges — the ability of individuals and communities to withstand and recover from adversity (Mahajan et al., 2022). This study explored the

dimensions of resilience in IDP camps, shedding light on coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies in enabling individuals to navigate conflict-induced displacement. Recognising that sustainable peace is integral to human security (Krampe, Hegazi, & VanDeveer, 2021), this research investigates in order to ascertain the numerous peacebuilding strategies adopted within IDP camps. By understanding these initiatives from residents and external actors, the study aims to illuminate the role of peacebuilding in mitigating the complexities associated with human security.

In conflict zones worldwide, the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within camps has become a critical issue of concern, reflecting on the intricate interplay of factors contributing to the complexities of human security (Titilope, Zakuan, & Osman, 2019). As vulnerable populations grapple with the challenges posed by conflict-induced displacement, understanding the multifaceted dynamics of their experiences within IDP camps is crucial.

In view of the established background, this study seeks to address the existing gap in literature by qualitatively exploring vulnerabilities, resilience mechanisms, and peacebuilding strategies among IDPs in conflict zones. By delving into live experiences, the research aims to contribute insights that inform more effective policies and interventions tailored to the specific needs of the IDP populations. The paper identifies and analyses vulnerabilities experienced by IDPs within conflict-affected areas, explores resilience mechanisms in navigating challenges within IDP camps, and investigates the role of peacebuilding strategies and their impact on enhancing human security within IDP communities.

Conceptual Discourse

The concept of human security, as outlined by Fukuda-Parr and Messineo (2012), focuses on ensuring the security of human lives and has gained increasing prominence since the mid-1990s (Gasper, 2010). Initially associated with state policies and the search for new international security and development agenda in post-Cold War, it is now widely used in policy advocacy by civil society groups on diverse issues such as civil war, migration, and climate change (O'Brien, 2010). Fukuda-Parr and Messineo (2012) noted that while human security has broad meanings in various contexts today, it originated in the debates about 'collective security' at the end of the Cold War.

Addressing its various meanings, Mohammed (2020) points out that human security encompasses development and survival, involving basic life needs like access to clean water, health, food, education, and poverty. Concerns for human security are growing due to pervasive human vulnerability, particularly in conflicts where non-state actors deviate from traditional rules of conduct, making old war strategies ineffective (Kaldor, 2007). Mohammed (2020) highlights numerous effects of conflicts on human security, including infrastructural decay, family structure disruption, health hazards, unemployment, poverty, and environmental consequences.

Examining human security in conflict zones in Nigeria, Ogundiya et al. (2018) emphasises the multidimensional impact of the *Boko Haram* insurgency, addressing economic instability, displacement, and social cohesion erosion. The vulnerability of women and children in conflict zones is exposed, with issues like gender-based violence and child recruitment highlighted (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2019). Adeleye et al. (2020) analyses the Nigerian government's strategies in managing human security, assessing security measures, humanitarian aid distribution, and governance. Mustapha and Umar (2017) explore the implications of ethnic dynamics, revealing how identity-based conflicts worsen vulnerabilities and hinder peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria's conflict-affected regions.

Conflict Zones and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria

Nigeria, a country known for its rich diversity and cultural heritage, unfortunately grapples with persistent conflict, giving rise to numerous conflict zones. These conflicts, whether stemming from ethnic tensions, religious disparities, or competition over resources, have led to the displacement of a substantial number of people, resulting in a complex humanitarian crisis.

In addressing these challenges, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is crucial for Nigeria. It involves tackling the root causes of conflicts, improving security measures, and prioritizing sustainable development. By concerted efforts at the local, national, and international levels, there is hope for rebuilding lives, fostering peace, and creating a more resilient and united Nigeria.

Often, conflicts in Nigeria have deep historical roots in ethnic and religious tensions (Aghedo, 2010). The North-South divide and the intricate interplay of diverse ethnic groups contribute to the

fragility of social cohesion. Similarly, conflicts over scarce resources, such as arable land and water, have been pivotal, intensifying tensions and displacing communities (Adesoji, 2010).

The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast has been a significant cause of displacement, forcing millions to flee due to violence and insecurity (Omotola, 2018). Additionally, communal clashes and farmer-herder conflicts, particularly in Benue State in the Middle Belt, have resulted in significant displacement, impacting the region's social fabric (Ikelegbe, 2010). The displacement has given rise to severe humanitarian challenges, with internally displaced persons (IDPs) facing issues related to shelter, food security, and access to healthcare (Akinyemi et al., 2019). Furthermore, the prolonged displacement and exposure to violence contribute to enduring psychosocial challenges among IDPs (Ibrahim & Alkali, 2019), including challenges related to human security in IDP camps in conflict zones, particularly in Benue State. Consequently, the persistent security challenges hinder effective aid delivery and pose obstacles to the safe return and reintegration of IDPs.

Understanding the dynamics of conflict zones and the plight of IDPs in Nigeria requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses root causes, improves security, and prioritizes sustainable development. Collaborative efforts at the local, national, and international levels are essential to alleviate the suffering of affected populations and foster long-term stability and resilience in Nigeria.

Peace Building in Post Conflict Communities

Preventing the recurrence of crises and conflicts remains a primary concern for post-conflict states, and establishing lasting peace is often perceived as a daunting task even after a violent conflict has ended (Johnson, 2023). The term "peace-building," was first coined by Johan Galtung in 1970, it gained further prominence when the United Nations published "An Agenda for Peace" in 1992, advocating proactive peace-making and humanitarian intervention (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Peacebuilding involves reconstructing the political, security, social, and economic dimensions of a society emerging from conflict, addressing root causes, promoting social and economic justice, and establishing governance and the rule of law is structured to consolidate peace, reconciliation, and development (Ramalingam, 2010). Aggestam and Björkdahl (2012) describe peacebuilding as a method focused on understanding direct cause-effect relationships, utilising a problem-solving model to analyse conflict, identify underlying factors, and propose solutions that address root causes.

Community peacebuilding processes and strategies encompasses various elements aimed at establishing security and promoting harmonious coexistence. Local engagement, interfaith dialogue, the role of Civil Society Organisations, and inclusive governance are crucial components. Integrating these insights into comprehensive peacebuilding frameworks can contribute to more effective and sustainable efforts to foster peace and stability in conflict-affected regions in Nigeria, such as Gamu Local Government Area and other areas in Benue State. Emphasising local initiatives and community engagement, Ajayi and Akinbola (2019) argue that sustainable peacebuilding interventions should incorporate and empower local communities in conflict resolution processes.

Interfaith dialogue and the involvement of religious leaders are highlighted by Okeke and Uzodike (2018) as impactful in peacebuilding strategies, particularly in Nigeria where conflicts often have religious dimensions. Religious institutions are seen as platforms for fostering understanding and reconciliation among diverse religious communities.

In post-conflict communities in Nigeria, conflict management plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable peace, reconciliation, and development. Deep-rooted divisions, grievances, and divergent interests among various groups in post-conflict areas can hinder progress and lead to renewed tensions (Clifford & Ejike, 2022). Identifying and handling conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently becomes paramount in rebuilding these communities, with a need for a comprehensive conflict management approach that addresses underlying causes such as historical grievances, political marginalisation, socioeconomic disparities, or resource competition (Clifford et al., 2022).

2. Research Method and Design

The research design for this paper was phenomenology study, with the aim of exploring the complexities of human security in conflict zones and shedding more light on the relationships between vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies. Qualitative research is well-suited for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of the interconnected themes of vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies from the participants' viewpoints. Therefore, the study employed in-depth interviews in gathering data.

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Participants for this study were selected from conflict-affected Guma Local Government Area in Benue State in the North Central Geo-political zone in Nigeria, and encompassing a range of demographics and backgrounds. Purposive sampling approach was employed toward ensuring the inclusion of representatives with various perspectives and experiences of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. The paper focuses on vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies, two IDP Camps, namely: Dauda Camp I, and Gbajimba Camp both in Guma Local council. From each of the two IDP camps, four (4) Informants were purposely selected.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews conducted with the Informants, and focusing on their experiences, perceptions of vulnerabilities on human security, peacebuilding strategies, and recommendations for enhancing human security and peacebuilding efforts within the conflict zones. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymised to ensure confidentiality of the sources. The study applied reflexivity by acknowledging and addressing possible biases of the research team. The study followed (Creswell, 2012) guidelines by applying thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. Subsequently, coding outline was developed based on emerging themes which was later refined iteratively throughout the analysis process. Then, qualitative data analysis software NVivo 14 was used to facilitate the process of storing, sorting, coding, analysing, and to generate graphical representation of the findings.

The right to privacy and confidentiality was disclosed to all Informants prior to the start of the interviews along with their Informed consent. Every Informant was assured that none of them will be identified by name at any time, before, during or in the analysis of this study. In view of this, each of the Informant, was identified in the analysis by code name. For instance, IDPs in Gbajimba Camp, are code named; Inf. F-GC-1, Inf. M-GC-2, Inf. M-GC-3, and Inf. F-GC-4 respectively. In the same way, internally displaced persons in Dauda Camp 1 were identified thus; Inf. M-DC1-5, Inf. M-DC1-6, Inf. F-DC1-7, and Inf. F-DC1-8 correspondingly.

For the data analysis, thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the collected data. This iterative process involved coding, categorising, and analysing the data to generate insights into the complexities of human security in the conflict zones.

3. Findings and Interpretations

Theme 1 Vulnerabilities and Human Security

The findings revealed a myriad of vulnerabilities faced by individuals in conflict zones, including physical threats, displacement, food insecurity, and limited access to basic services. The erosion of social cohesion and trust exacerbates these vulnerabilities, creating a challenging environment for affected populations.

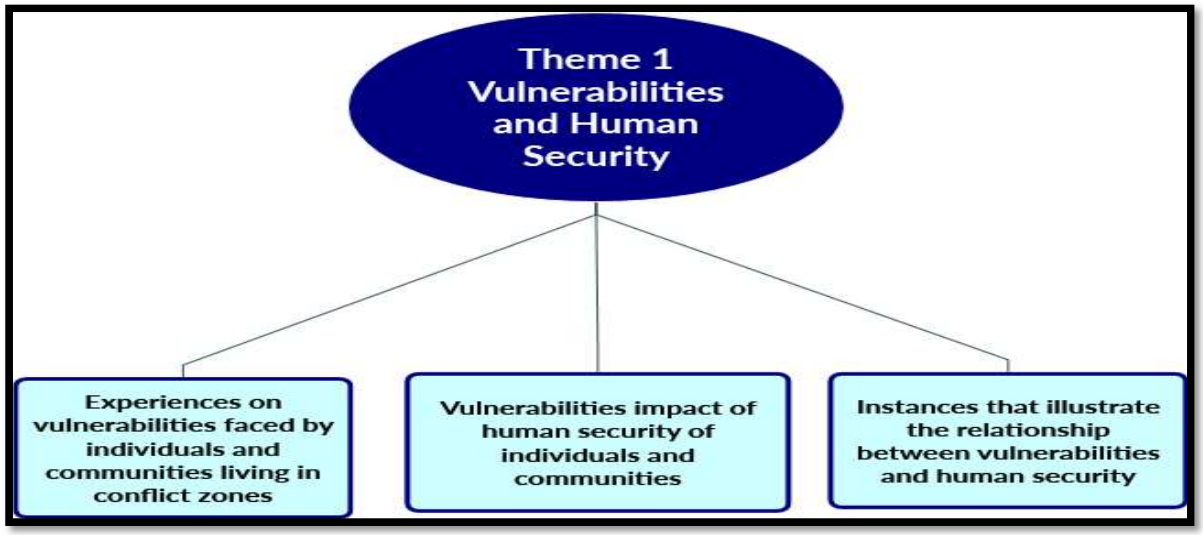


Figure 1. Graphical representation of theme 1 sub-themes of findings

Experiences on Vulnerabilities Faced by Individuals and Communities Living in Conflict Zones

The study's finding provides a poignant insight into the significant challenges and hardships faced by a community in a conflict-affected region. Each of the response sheds light on different aspects of the community's struggle. According to INF. F-GC-1 who said, "In our conflict-affected community, people face constant fear and uncertainty due to the ongoing violence. Many have lost their homes and livelihoods, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and displacement." The overarching fear and uncertainty that pervades the community due to ongoing violence was stressed. People have lost their homes and livelihoods, making them vulnerable to exploitation and displacement. This conveys the deep-rooted impact of conflict on the community's stability and security. Buttressing this, Doocy et al., (2013) noted that lack of access to healthcare infrastructure further exacerbates physical vulnerabilities, leading to increased morbidity and mortality rates.

Similarly, I Inf. M-GC-2 disclosed that, "During the conflict, access to essential resources like food and clean water becomes limited, making individuals, especially children and the elderly, susceptible to malnutrition and health issues." The finding touched on the scarcity of essential resources during conflict, such as food and clean water, emphasising the severe implications on the health and well-being of individuals, particularly children and the elderly. This speaks to the humanitarian crisis arising from conflict. According to Inf. M-GC-3, women and girls in the community are at risk of sexual violence and exploitation as they go about their daily activities, "Women and girls often face heightened vulnerabilities, including sexual violence and exploitation. They fear for their safety while carrying out daily activities like fetching water or going to the market." This finding was confirmed by Jacobsen (2017) who said, vulnerable groups, including women and children, often face heightened risks of exploitation, abuse, and displacement.

Justifying the vulnerabilities faced by individuals and communities living in conflict zones, Inf. F-GC-4 disclosed that, "The lack of access to education and healthcare due to conflict-related disruptions leaves our community's youth with limited opportunities and exposes them to the risk of recruitment by armed groups." As for Inf. M-DC1-5 he illustrates the secondary consequences of conflict on security, "With the breakdown of law and order, criminal elements exploit the vulnerabilities of our community members, leading to increased instances of theft and extortion." However, Inf. M-DC1-6 highlighted the psychological impact of conflict thus, "The trauma of witnessing violence and losing loved ones affects the mental well-being of individuals, making it challenging for them to cope with the ongoing insecurity." Other sources shared similar but varied opinions on their experiences and observations regarding the vulnerabilities faced by individuals and communities living in conflict zones of Dauda IDP Camp 1 and Gbajimba IDP camps in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.

The responses collectively paint a grim picture of the multifaceted impact of conflict on this community, touching on physical, emotional, and social dimensions of their lives. The data reflects the urgent need for humanitarian intervention and support to address the various challenges these individuals face.

Vulnerabilities and Impact of Human Security of Individuals and Communities

On how the vulnerabilities impact the overall human security of individuals and communities in conflict-affected areas of Dauda IDP Camp I and Gbajimba IDP Camp in Guma LG, the findings revealed a deeper understanding of the multifaceted consequences of conflict on the community. For instance, Inf. F-GC-1: highlights the erosion of people's sense of safety and well-being as a result of vulnerabilities caused by the conflict thus, "These vulnerabilities erode people's sense of safety and well-being, leading to a constant state of insecurity and fear for the future." Similarly, Inf. M-GC-2, emphasised what can make the IPDs more susceptible to diseases and malnutrition, "The lack of access to basic necessities and healthcare compromises the physical health of individuals, making them more susceptible to diseases and malnutrition." Other sources from Gbajimba IDP Camp in Guma LG also expressed concerns on the conditions and vulnerabilities of people.

From the Dauda IDP Camp, INF. M-DC1-5 disclosed the fear of violence and insecurity's impact on mobility, "The fear of violence and insecurity hinders mobility, limiting access to markets, schools, and healthcare facilities, thereby restricting opportunities for personal and economic growth." Expressing worries on youth recruitment by armed groups as a threat to the community's long-term stability and security, Inf. M-DC1-6 said, "The vulnerability of youth to recruitment by armed groups

poses a threat to the long-term stability and security of the community." Justifying the contribution to a breakdown in law and order, which perpetuates a cycle of insecurity INF. F-DC1-7 disclosed thus, "The exploitation of vulnerable populations by criminal elements further contributes to a breakdown in law and order, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity." Corroborating this, Inf. F-DC1-8 said, "The overall human security of the community is compromised as these vulnerabilities create a sense of helplessness and despair, hindering efforts to rebuild and recover from the conflict's impacts." Conflict-related trauma, stress, and mental health disorders are prevalent among individuals in conflict zones (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). This finding has provided a wide-ranging view of the interconnected challenges faced by the community due to the conflict. The erosion of safety, well-being, physical health, and trust within the community is central to understanding the profound and lasting impact of conflict.

Instances that Illustrate the Relationship Between Vulnerabilities and Human Security

For clear understanding of the challenges, the interviewees presented specific examples that illustrates the relationship between vulnerabilities and human security in the IDPs camps in Guma conflict zones. According to Inf. F-GC-1 who offers insights into the complex and devastating impact of the conflict on the community thus, "During a recent armed attack in our village, many families had to flee with little to no belongings, rendering them vulnerable to the harsh conditions of displacement." Inf. M-GC-2 identifies factors that lead to disease outbreaks, with cholera being specifically mentioned, "In the absence of proper sanitation facilities, outbreaks of diseases like cholera have affected our community's health, exacerbating vulnerabilities." Similarly, Inf. M-GC-3, highlighting the trauma they experienced, which affects their sense of security and dignity, "Instances of sexual violence against women and girls have left them traumatised, impacting their sense of security and dignity."

Meanwhile, Inf. M-DC1-5 describes how disruption of supply chains during the conflict lead to skyrocketing of food prices, "During the conflict, food prices skyrocketed due to disruptions in supply chains, making it difficult for vulnerable families to afford adequate nutrition." Specifically, Inf. F-DC1-7 disclosed that elderly individuals are particularly vulnerable, as they are often are unable to flee during attacks and thus, they had to bear the brunt of violence, "Elderly individuals, who are unable to flee during attacks, often bear the brunt of violence and suffer from neglect and abandonment." Very importantly, Inf. F-DC1-8 highlights the role of lawlessness in further destabilising the community, "The lack of law enforcement officers in conflict zones enables criminal groups to exploit the vulnerable ones, leading to extortion and theft within the community."

The findings have established the profound and diverse vulnerabilities and consequences that the community faces due to the conflict. The impact is far-reaching, affecting safety, health, education, economic well-being, and social fabrics. These insights stress the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address the challenges and support the community's recovery and resilience.

Theme 2 Role of Peacebuilding Strategies

This study discovered that innovative peacebuilding strategies were employed by individuals and communities, including inter-group dialogue, grassroots initiatives, and collaborative efforts with external stakeholders. These strategies exemplify the agency of conflict-affected populations in shaping their own security and promoting peace.



Figure 2. Graphical representation of theme 2 sub-themes of findings

Role of Peacebuilding Strategies, Initiatives, and Interventions

Regarding the role of peacebuilding strategies, initiatives, and interventions in promoting human security within conflict zones, Inf. F-GC-1 underscores how peacebuilding strategies create opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation, "Peacebuilding strategies create opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation, helping in addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering long-term stability, which contributes to human security." Echoing his view, Inf. M-GC-2, noted that to reduce the likelihood of violence and creates a safer environment for individuals and communities, "Peacebuilding initiatives build trust and cooperation among conflicting parties, reducing the likelihood of violence and creating a safer environment for individuals and communities." As for Inf. F-GC-4 peacebuilding strategies promote social cohesion and inclusivity, mitigating divisions within the community thus, "By promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, peacebuilding strategies mitigate divisions within the community, making it less susceptible to external manipulation and violence."

Explaining the strategies further, Inf. M-DC1-5 disclosed that peacebuilding initiatives reduces the threat of armed groups and enhances the overall human security in conflict zones, emphasising the role of reintegration in reducing violence, "Peacebuilding fosters the reintegration of ex-combatants into society, reducing the threat of armed groups and enhancing overall human security in conflict zones." According to Inf. M-DC1-6 peacebuilding effort empowers individuals and communities to resolve disputes peacefully and participate in decision-making processes, "Through capacity-building and education, peacebuilding initiatives empower individuals and communities to resolve their disputes peacefully and participate in decision-making processes." Inf. F-DC1-8 explained that advocacy and awareness campaigns on human rights and justice are recognised for promoting accountability for past atrocities, "Advocacy and awareness campaigns on human rights and justice promote accountability for past atrocities, contributing to a sense of safety and protection within the community." In line with this finding, comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives are required to address underlying grievances, promote social cohesion, and create an environment conducive to lasting peace (Paris, 2004).

The finding discussed here emphasised the positive impact of peacebuilding initiatives in addressing the root causes of conflict, building trust, preventing violence, promoting unity and inclusivity, empowering individuals, and fostering economic stability. Peacebuilding efforts are seen as integral to improving human security and creating a safer, more stable environment in conflict-affected areas.

Examples of Peacebuilding Efforts Positive Impact on Human Security

The findings on the examples of peacebuilding efforts believe to have had a positive impact on human security in Dauda IDP Camp 1 and Gbajimba IDP Camp in Guma conflict-affected areas, provide specific examples of successful peacebuilding initiatives and their positive impact on the community at a particular time. Inf. F-GC-1 highlights the effectiveness of a local peacebuilding organisation in facilitating dialogues between rival factions, resulting in a ceasefire agreement and a significant reduction in violence, "A local peacebuilding organisation facilitated dialogues between rival factions in our community, leading to a ceasefire agreement and a significant reduction in violence." Buttressing this, Inf. M-GC-2 said, "A peace education program implemented in schools taught children conflict resolution skills, resulting in fewer incidents of violence and bullying among students." The perspectives of other sources such as Inf. M-GC-3, and Inf. F-GC-4 described the process that brought healing and closure to victims of past atrocities.

From the perspectives of IDPs in Dauda Camp1, Inf. M-DC1-5 stressed the involvement of a women's peace group in mediating between warring factions is highlighted as a key element of successful peacebuilding, "A women's peace group played a crucial role in mediating between warring factions, demonstrating the importance of women's inclusion in peacebuilding efforts."

Meanwhile, Inf. M-DC1-6 highlights the importance of community engagement and proactive measures in conflict prevention thus, "A community-driven initiative established a local early warning system, enabling the timely detection of security threats and preventing potential conflicts." Also, Inf. F-DC1-7 illustrates the role of economic opportunities in preventing the reengagement of former combatants, "A vocational training program for ex-combatants provided them with alternative livelihood options, reducing the risk of their involvement in further violence."

The interpretations revealed a diverse approaches and strategies that can be employed in peacebuilding efforts, resulting in reduced violence, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and community empowerment. This was corroborated by Doyle and Sambanis (2006) who revealed that by addressing underlying grievances and fostering dialogue, peacebuilding initiatives create an environment that mitigates the risk of conflict escalation.

Obstacles Faced by Peacebuilding Strategies

The findings on the key challenges faced by peacebuilding strategies within conflict areas in Benue State shed light on various challenges and obstacles that can impede effective peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas. For instance, Inf. F-GC-1 highlights the critical role of trust among conflicting parties in the success of peacebuilding efforts thus, "Lack of trust among conflicting parties can hinder the progress of peacebuilding efforts, making it difficult to find common ground and lasting resolutions."

Similarly, Inf. M-GC-2 acknowledged the significant challenge to peacebuilding thus, "The presence of spoilers, individuals or groups opposed to peace, can undermine peacebuilding initiatives and perpetuate violence." Raising salient point on the obstacles to peacebuilding strategies, Inf. M-GC-3, stressed the limitations that often hinder the scope and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts therefore underscoring the need for adequate resources to support effective interventions, "Resource constraints and limited funding often limits the scope and sustainability of peacebuilding projects, hindering their impact on human security."

Another interviewee, Inf. M-DC1-5 noted that addressing deeply ingrained norms and attitudes is a complex but necessary aspect of promoting long lasting peace and security, "Socio-cultural norms that perpetuate violence and discrimination can pose significant obstacles to implementing peacebuilding strategies effectively." Meanwhile, Inf. M-DC1-6 recognises that the persistence of underlying root causes of conflicts, such as political grievances or historical animosities, can make sustainable peacebuilding a challenging task, "The complexity and persistence of underlying root causes of conflicts, such as political grievances or historical animosities, make sustainable peacebuilding a challenging task." Another challenge identified by Inf. F-DC1-7 Security risks for peacebuilders and aid workers operating in conflict zones therefore, there is the need for ensuring their safety, "Security risks for peacebuilders and aid workers operating in conflict zones can impede their ability to access communities and implement interventions."

The various challenges and complexities that peacebuilding initiatives face, including issues related to trust, external interference, resource limitations, cultural norms, and security risks. Have been discovered in the findings. Similarly, the finding stressed that attention to these challenges is essential to promote sustainable peace and human security in conflict-affected regions.

Theme 3 Enhancing Human Security and Peacebuilding Efforts

Recommendations for Enhancing Human Security and Peacebuilding Efforts

Based on the knowledge and experiences of the victims of violence in Guma LG of Benue State, insights and recommendations that can bring about enhancing human security and peacebuilding efforts in the Local Government were provided in this section. According to Inf. F-GC-1 who emphasises the importance of investing in education and skill development programs, "Investing in education and skill development programs can empower individuals in conflict zones, reducing their vulnerabilities and enhancing their capacity to contribute to peacebuilding efforts." Another perspective towards enhancing human security and peacebuilding efforts was offered by Inf. M-GC-2 who said, "Addressing the root causes of conflicts, such as socio-economic disparities and historical grievances, is essential for sustainable peacebuilding and improved human security outcomes." Suggesting a way out, Inf. M-GC-3 emphasises the importance of community-driven approaches in peace efforts thus, "Engaging with local civil society organisations and community leaders to identify specific needs and priorities can lead to more targeted and effective peacebuilding interventions."

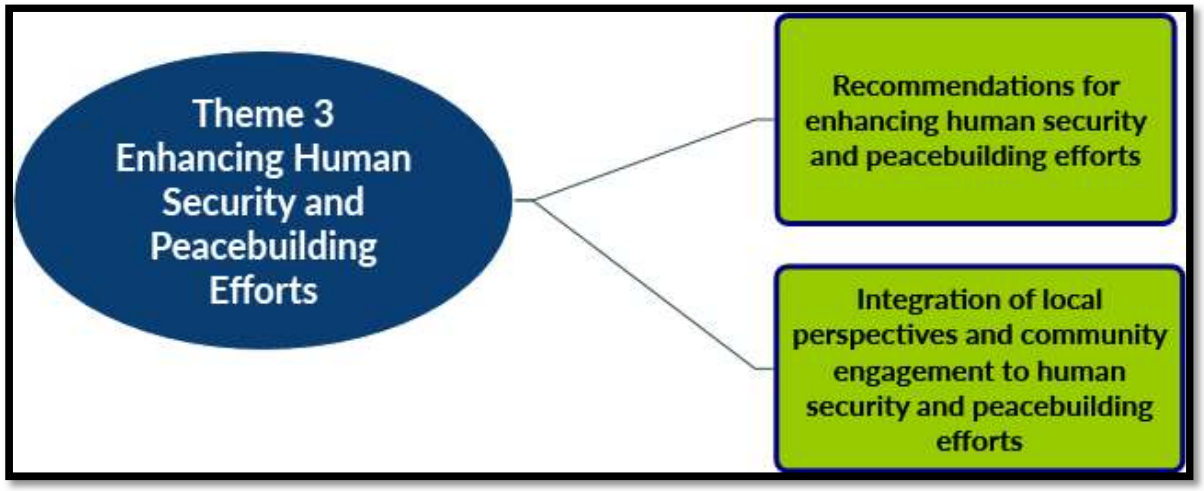


Figure 3. Graphical representation of theme 3 sub-themes of findings

Corroborating this further, Inf. M-DC1-5 calls for enhanced access to justice and the rule of law as crucial for holding perpetrators of violence accountable and rebuilding trust in conflict-affected areas, "Enhancing access to justice and the rule of law is crucial for holding perpetrators of violence accountable and rebuilding trust in conflict-affected areas." Calling for inclusive approach is vital for addressing the diverse needs and concerns of all members of a community, Inf. M-DC1-6 said, "Engaging with and integrating the perspectives of marginalised groups, including youth and minorities, ensures more comprehensive and sustainable peacebuilding efforts." Meanwhile, Inf. F-DC1-7 disclosed that collaboration on both local and international levels can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding, "Fostering regional and international cooperation in peacebuilding initiatives can create a supportive environment and strengthen efforts to address cross-border challenges."

The sources interviewed in Guma LG highlighted various approaches and strategies that can contribute to more effective and holistic peacebuilding efforts, with a focus on addressing root causes, inclusivity, and collaboration at multiple levels. These approaches aim to enhance human security and foster sustainable peace in conflict-affected areas.

Integration of Local Perspectives and Community Engagements to Human Security and Peacebuilding Efforts

On how local perspectives and community engagement can be better integrated into human security and peacebuilding efforts, the informants emphasised on the importance of community engagement and ownership in peacebuilding efforts. For instance, Inf. F-GC-1 accentuated on the significance of community-driven peacebuilding, "Conducting regular consultations with local communities and involving them in needs assessments will ensure that interventions align with their priorities and realities." Another suggestion from Inf. M-GC-2 said by empowering local leaders and community representatives to play active roles in peacebuilding projects will bring about fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to sustainable outcomes, "Empowering local leaders and community representatives to play active roles in peacebuilding projects will foster a sense of ownership and commitment to sustainable outcomes." Similarly, Inf. M-GC-3 noted that enriching peacebuilding efforts with local wisdom highlights the importance of recognising and respecting cultural diversity, "Promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledge, enriching peacebuilding efforts with local wisdom."

Suggesting an approach for fostering a sense of self-determination within communities, Inf. M-DC1-5 supporting community-led initiatives and self-organisation is seen as empowering individuals to take charge of their own security and peacebuilding needs, "Supporting community-led initiatives and self-organisation empowers individuals to take charge of their own security and peacebuilding needs, fostering a sense of agency." Also, Inf. M-DC1-6 emphasises the importance of building local capacity thus, "Providing training and capacity-building programs to local organisations and civil society groups equips them with the skills needed to contribute effectively to peacebuilding

efforts." Inf. F-DC1-7 identified the need to ensure that peacebuilding messages reach a broader audience and resonate with the community, "Utilising local communication channels, including traditional media and community gatherings, ensures that peacebuilding messages reach a broader audience and resonate with the community." Finally, Inf. F-DC1-8 emphasises the importance of community engagement and responsiveness thus, "Establishing feedback mechanisms that allow community members to share their perspectives on ongoing peacebuilding initiatives promotes transparency and accountability."

These findings underscore the importance of community engagement, inclusivity, local leadership, and cultural sensitivity in peacebuilding efforts. Community ownership and participation are essential elements of building sustainable peace and security.

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings underscore the intricate and interconnected nature of human security in conflict zones. Vulnerabilities, resilience, and peacebuilding strategies are intertwined, with each Influencing and shaping the others. The study highlights the importance of recognising the agency of conflict-affected populations in shaping their security and fostering peace. Local initiatives, including traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and grassroots peacebuilding efforts, emerge as integral components for fostering sustainable peace. This highlights the importance of recognising and empowering local communities as key stakeholders in the peacebuilding process. Such approaches are not only culturally sensitive but also more likely to gain the trust and active participation of the affected population.

The role of religion, particularly through interfaith dialogue and engagement with religious leaders, is identified as a crucial factor in peacebuilding efforts. By promoting understanding and collaboration among diverse religious communities, these strategies contribute to reducing religious tensions and fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society. The findings suggest that integrating religious leaders into formal peacebuilding frameworks can leverage their influence to promote reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) plays a pivotal role in peacebuilding, contributing to advocacy, conflict resolution training, and community mobilisation. The finding underscores the need to strengthen the capacity of CSOs and facilitate collaboration with governmental and non-governmental entities. The active involvement of CSOs is vital for bridging gaps, amplifying community voices, and ensuring that peacebuilding efforts addresses the nuanced challenges of conflict zones in Nigeria. Also, the significance of inclusive governance and policy frameworks in promoting peacebuilding emerged. Policies that address the root causes of conflict, promote social inclusion, and ensure equitable resource distribution are identified as crucial elements for sustainable peace. This highlights the interconnectedness of political structures and peace outcomes, emphasising the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to governance in conflict-affected regions.

5. Conclusion

This empirical qualitative research provides valuable insights into the complexities of human security within conflict zones. By unveiling the vulnerabilities, resilience mechanisms, and peacebuilding strategies of individuals and communities, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of human security dynamics in conflict-affected regions. The study underscores the need for context-specific approaches to address the multifaceted challenges faced by populations in conflict zones and highlights the potential for local agencies in shaping a more secure and peaceful future.

The urgency of comprehensive approaches addressing economic instability, displacement, and social cohesion erosion is imperative. Vulnerabilities are heightened among women and children, emphasising on the need for targeted interventions. Peacebuilding strategies in Nigeria's conflict zones require a multifaceted approach. Local initiatives and community engagement prove to be crucial, emphasising the role of grassroots efforts and traditional mediation. Interfaith dialogue, involvement of religious leaders, and collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are effective strategies that need to be intensified.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to policy makers and community leaders:

i. The policy makers need to implement targeted interventions for vulnerable populations, with a focus on women and children. Also, government should prioritise economic stability, social cohesion, and displacement management in policy frameworks.

ii. In addition to this, all stakeholders should empower local communities through community-driven peacebuilding initiatives. Given that most conflicts have a touch of religion, peacebuilders should foster interfaith dialogue and involve religious leaders in conflict resolution processes. Finally, the government should implement inclusive governance structures and policy frameworks to address root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace in Nigeria's conflict-affected regions.

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