

The Impact of Insurgency on Peacebuilding Efforts Among Displaced Communities in Borno State, Nigeria

Bassey Kenneth Egede¹, Iroye Samuel², & Orebiyi Taiwo³

Department of Peace and Conflict Resolution,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja

Corresponding Author's email: bababasseyo@gmail.com

Abstract

Since 2009, Borno State in northeastern Nigeria has remained the epicentre of protracted violence and displacement triggered by Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency. Despite numerous peacebuilding interventions—Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), community reconciliation, humanitarian aid, and women's empowerment initiatives—outcomes have been undermined by fragmented governance, persistent insecurity, and deep-rooted social exclusion. This mixed-methods study investigates the effectiveness and limitations of peacebuilding and reintegration programmes among internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, ex-combatants, women's collectives, and community leaders in four key localities. Quantitative survey (n=320) findings reveal that while 77.5% of respondents participate in peacebuilding activities, trust in ex-combatants remains low, and reintegration acceptance is markedly shaped by gender, education, and displacement status. Qualitative interviews and focus groups highlight that DDR and women's peacebuilding efforts are constrained by stigma, inadequate psychosocial support, economic deprivation, and underrepresentation in formal structures. The Human Security and Lederach's peacebuilding frameworks expose fundamental barriers—insufficient local ownership, militarised aid, governance distrust, and exclusion of women and youth. The study recommends context-responsive, trauma-informed approaches, institutionalised gender mainstreaming, community-driven DDR, inclusive justice mechanisms, and livelihood restoration. True resilience, it argues, can only be achieved by empowering local actors, especially women, ensuring long-term psychosocial care, and aligning external resources with grassroots priorities. These insights are vital for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking transformative, sustainable peacebuilding in Borno State.

Keywords: Borno State, Insurgency, Peacebuilding, Reintegration Programmes, Women's Empowerment

L'impact de l'insurrection sur les Efforts de Consolidation de la Paix Auprès des Communautés Déplacées dans L'Etat de Borno au Nigeria

Résumé

Depuis 2009, l'État de Borno, dans le nord-est du Nigéria, demeure l'épicentre de violences et de déplacements de population prolongés, déclenchés par l'insurrection de Boko Haram et de l'ISWAP. Malgré de nombreuses interventions de consolidation de la paix – désarmement, démobilisation et réintégration (DDR), réconciliation communautaire, aide humanitaire et initiatives d'autonomisation des femmes – les résultats sont compromis par une gouvernance fragmentée, une insécurité persistante et une exclusion sociale profondément enracinée. Cette étude, combinant différentes méthodes, examine l'efficacité et les limites des programmes de consolidation de la paix et de réintégration auprès des personnes déplacées internes (PDI), des rapatriés, des ex-combattants, des collectifs de femmes et des leaders communautaires dans quatre localités clés. Les résultats d'une enquête quantitative (n=320) révèlent que si 77,5 % des répondants participent à des activités de consolidation de la paix, la confiance envers les ex-combattants reste faible et l'acceptation de la réintégration est fortement influencée par le genre, le niveau d'éducation et le statut de déplacé. Des entretiens qualitatifs et des groupes de discussion soulignent que les efforts de DDR et de consolidation de la paix menés par les femmes sont entravés par la stigmatisation, un soutien psychosocial insuffisant, la précarité économique et la sous-représentation des femmes dans les structures formelles. Les cadres de sécurité humaine et de consolidation de la paix de Lederach mettent en lumière des obstacles fondamentaux : une appropriation locale insuffisante, une aide militarisée, la méfiance envers la gouvernance et l'exclusion des femmes et des jeunes. L'étude recommande des approches adaptées au contexte et tenant compte des traumatismes, l'intégration institutionnalisée de la dimension de genre, un DDR piloté par les communautés, des mécanismes de justice inclusifs et la restauration des moyens de subsistance. Selon elle, une véritable résilience ne peut être atteinte qu'en autonomisant les acteurs locaux, notamment les femmes, en garantissant une prise en charge psychosociale à long terme et en alignant les ressources externes sur les priorités locales. Ces conclusions sont essentielles pour les chercheurs, les praticiens et les décideurs politiques qui œuvrent pour une consolidation de la paix transformatrice et durable dans l'État de Borno.

Mots-clés : *État de Borno, insurrection, consolidation de la paix, programmes de réintégration, autonomisation des femmes*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the urgency of effective peacebuilding in regions plagued by protracted conflict has become a defining concern for scholars and policymakers worldwide. In no context is this more evident than in northeastern Nigeria, where cycles of violence, displacement, and humanitarian crisis converge, testing the limits of existing frameworks and interventions. This study is positioned within the broader search for solutions to mass displacement and chronic insecurity—asking not only what has been attempted, but why outcomes remain persistently fragile or disappointing, and how future efforts might meaningfully address the needs of Nigeria’s most vulnerable communities^{1,2}.

Since 2009, Nigeria’s peacebuilding landscape has been dramatically shaped by the Boko Haram insurgency and, since 2016, the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The epicentre of these crises—Borno State—has become an emblem of both grave humanitarian suffering and determined, yet complex, responses to conflict. Ongoing violence has devastated millions of lives through mass displacement, the breakdown of economic systems, and the erosion of trust in governmental and social institutions^{3,4}. By 2024, estimates suggest that over two million people remain internally displaced, almost half residing in Maiduguri, Borno’s capital, or within militarised enclaves. The scale of devastation is not solely reflected in numbers, but in the profound social and psychological scars borne by survivors—scars that hinder both relief and long-term recovery⁵.

Peacebuilding in Borno cannot be understood as a “post-conflict” project; rather, it is a continually evolving struggle to restore social fabric under the constant threat of violence. Despite an array of well-intentioned interventions—spanning state-led programmes, international donor initiatives, and grassroots efforts by civil society, the outcomes have been uneven and, in many cases, deeply troubled. The volatility of the region is amplified by porous borders with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, which enable

¹ Ajayi, A. I., N. Okorie, and S. Bakare, “Community Resilience and Peacebuilding Strategies in Post-Boko Haram Borno State, Nigeria,” *African Security Review* 31, no. 2 (2022): 101–119.

² Human Rights Watch, “Nigeria: Human Rights and Security Report 2023,” 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/nigeria>.

³ IOM, “Displacement Tracking Matrix—Round 46: Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe),” International Organization for Migration, 2024.

⁴ UNDP Nigeria, “Pathways for Peace: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in North-East Nigeria—Annual Review 2021–2022,” 2022.

⁵ ACAPS, “Nigeria (Borno State): Humanitarian Needs Overview,” 2023, <https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/2023>.

armed groups to shift tactics, exploit local economies, and wield displacement itself as both a weapon and a revenue source⁶.

Early literature often situated Boko Haram as a monolithic actor, but more recent research reveals a fragmented, adaptive insurgency, with ISWAP and splinter groups employing coercive systems that, while sometimes filling “governance” voids, deeply undermine justice and local authority^{7,8}. The impact is a multidimensional “governance deficit”: a competition for legitimacy between state actors, insurgent leaders, and traditional authorities, which produces ambiguity and, too often, paralysis⁸.

Despite the proliferation of peacebuilding initiatives in response to the crisis, four specific efforts have proven particularly vulnerable to the ongoing violence and instability in Borno State. The first is the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes: These have become a hallmark of Nigeria’s peace strategy, aiming to facilitate the transition of ex-combatants back into civilian life. However, in Borno, DDR efforts have frequently faltered or become counterproductive due to community suspicion, stigmatisation of returnees, lack of adequate livelihood opportunities, and the persistent psychological trauma among both ex-combatants and civilian populations. The absence of sustainable economic integration and insufficient psychosocial support have limited the effectiveness of DDR, often fueling new cycles of mistrust and violence^{9,2,3}.

The second is the Community Reconciliation and Transitional Justice Mechanisms: Designed to promote healing and rebuilding community trust, local reconciliation initiatives and truth commissions have been repeatedly undermined by widespread trauma, weak institutional frameworks, inadequate resources, and persistent gender and generational biases. Many communities, deeply scarred by violence, resist forgiveness, struggle with inclusion, and often exclude women and youth from formal

⁶ Amnesty International, “‘We Dried Our Tears’: Addressing the Challenges for Internally Displaced Women in Borno State, Nigeria,” 2023.

⁷ Adeleke, A., and O. C. Ezeobi, “Peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria: New Actors and Emerging Challenges,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 17, no. 1 (2022): 65–79.

⁸ Olonisakin, F., A. Shettima, and M. Hassan, “Cross-Border Dynamics and Insurgency in Borno State: Implications for Peacebuilding,” *The Round Table* 112, no. 2 (2023): 142–159, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2023.2162741>.

⁹ Asaju, K., and M. Adie, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes in Northern Nigeria,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 23, no. 2 (2023): 231–251.

peace processes, thus perpetuating “conflicted peace” rather than genuine reconciliation^{10,11}.

Thirdly is the Humanitarian Aid and Livelihood Restoration: Humanitarian programmes intended to provide basic needs and restore livelihoods have faced chronic disruption from ongoing attacks, logistical challenges, and military strategies such as the “super camp” approach. The militarisation of aid delivery, frequent attacks on convoys, and the destruction or isolation of rural areas have rendered hundreds of communities inaccessible, fostered aid dependency, and limited the reach and sustainability of recovery interventions^{12,2}.

And lastly is the Women’s Peacebuilding and Protection Initiatives: Grassroots women’s organisations have innovated survival strategies, led interfaith dialogues, and organised trauma healing. However, their capacity to shape decision-making remains severely constrained by patriarchal norms, persistent insecurity, and chronic underrepresentation in formal structures—from peace negotiation committees to donor funding channels. The failure to systematically include gender perspectives diminishes trust, limits the potential for durable peace, and exacerbates vulnerabilities for women and girls^{13,11}.

Each of these efforts reveals not only gaps in strategic design and implementation but also the formidable barriers created by context-specific realities—ranging from ongoing violence and social fragmentation to the legacies of exclusion and trauma. While some peacebuilding interventions have produced localised improvements in security or social cohesion, their positive impacts have rarely been sustained or widely replicated. Persistent obstacles include; inadequate local ownership and participation, which results in externally-driven models poorly adapted to local realities^{14,4}; weak coordination among government agencies, NGOs, military, and traditional leaders, causing duplication, competition, and fragmentation of initiatives^{14,12}; Failure to systematically disaggregate research data and programme outcomes by gender, age, and other social variables, concealing critical nuances and perpetuating patterns of

¹⁰ UN Women, “Women’s Leadership in Peacebuilding: Lessons from Northeast Nigeria,” UN Women Nigeria, 2021.

¹¹ Amaraegbu, D. A., “Women and Peacebuilding in the Northeast: Opportunities and Challenges in Borno State,” *African Journal of Gender and Development* 9, no. 3 (2022): 47–68.

¹² International Crisis Group, “An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing the Context and Prospects for Peace in Nigeria,” 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/b144-exit-boko-haram>.

¹³ UN Women, “Women and Girls in Borno: A Rapid Assessment,” 2023, <https://nigeria.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023>.

¹⁴ Ibrahim, J., and M. Kolo, “Grassroots Peacebuilding and the Limits of Top-Down Approaches in Northeast Nigeria,” *Journal of African Conflict and Peace Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 34–56.

exclusion^{4,9}; The militarisation of humanitarian space, tying civilian access and aid flows to proximity to military forces, undermining civilian trust and humanitarian neutrality^{12,2}; and, Deep-rooted patriarchy and cultural resistance to women's and youths' participation, further eroding the inclusiveness and effectiveness of peace processes^{10,11}.

Instead of delivering sustainable peace, many interventions have inadvertently reinforced vulnerabilities, widened trust deficits, or left critical needs unmet—especially for women, youth, and minority groups^{15,13}. Recognising these challenges, the present study employs the Human Security framework alongside Lederach's peacebuilding model. The Human Security perspective shifts the discourse from state-centric, militarised solutions to priorities centered on individual and community well-being—underscoring not just survival but the fulfillment of basic rights and dignity. This approach advocates for context-sensitive, participatory programming that reduces both direct and structural violence, incorporates grassroots perspectives, and attends to the psychological as well as material realities of displaced populations^{4,14}.

Lederach's model complements this with an emphasis on relational repair, long-term trust-building, and the critical roles of intermediary actors such as local women, youth, religious, and traditional leaders⁸. However, both models are challenged by “hybrid governance” realities—a landscape where the boundaries between state, insurgent, and customary authority blur, and where technocratic, donor-driven “blueprint” solutions often clash with complex local dynamics¹⁴.

This research is motivated by clear gaps in empirical data, policy practice, and the efficacy of peacebuilding interventions among Borno's displaced communities. Specifically, few studies have meaningfully disaggregated experiences and outcomes by gender, age, ethnicity, or occupation, with a notable absence of sustained, longitudinal analysis to track empowerment, trauma recovery, or the reintegration of returnees over time^{4,9}. Furthermore, the omission of local voices, especially women, youth, and religious/traditional authorities, continues to skew both knowledge generation and the strategic direction of programming - limiting the design of truly responsive, sustainable models^{11,10}.

¹⁵ Yagboyaju, D. A., and O. Akinyemi, “Mainstreaming Gender in Nigeria's Post-Insurgency Peacebuilding: Current Practices and Prospects,” *Journal of Gender, Information & Development in Africa* 12, no. 2 (2023): 215–234.

Building on documented lessons and persistent gaps, this study aims to critically examine the types, outcomes, and limitations of major peacebuilding efforts targeting displaced communities in Borno, identify the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that undermine the effectiveness of these interventions, highlight the lived perspectives of women, youth, and marginalised groups central to sustainable peace, yet consistently peripheral in formal programming and offer pragmatic recommendations for reorienting policy and practice towards inclusivity, resilience, and long-term social restoration. By foregrounding the agency, needs, and voices of those most affected, this research aspires to generate actionable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers striving to transform the trajectory of peacebuilding in Borno State.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the impact of insurgency on peacebuilding initiatives in Borno State.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of reintegration programmes for ex-combatants.
3. To explore the role of women in post-insurgency peacebuilding.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the complexities of peacebuilding and ex-combatant reintegration in Borno State, Nigeria. The research focused specifically on the perspectives and lived realities of internally displaced persons (IDPs), recent returnees, ex-combatants, local leaders, women's collectives, and youth groups in Maiduguri and three neighbouring Local Government Areas (LGAs)—namely, Jere, Konduga, and Mafa. The mixed-methods design allowed triangulation of findings and provided both breadth and depth in analysing peacebuilding dynamics.

The four study locations (Maiduguri, Jere, Konduga, and Mafa) were selected for their prominence in displacement patterns, active peacebuilding interventions, and high density of both IDPs and returnees³. Communities within these LGAs host major IDP camps, resettlement sites, and reconstructed villages, offering diverse perspectives on reintegration efforts. A total of 320 respondents was determined as the optimal sample size to achieve statistical validity and meaningful subgroup analysis. This number was established using population estimates from recent humanitarian registries, assuming a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and an assumed response distribution of

50% for binary peacebuilding participation (Yamane, 1967 formula). The target population across sites was approximately 200,000³.

Quantitative Component: A structured questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data from 320 respondents across the four study locations, utilising a multistage sampling approach. In the first stage, each location was regarded as a primary sampling unit. The second stage involved randomly selecting three major IDP camps or resettlement communities within each location. Subsequently, households and community gathering points, such as markets, places of worship, and vocational centers, were used as recruitment contexts. The final stage applied proportional quota sampling within each site to reflect key population categories—IDPs, returnees, ex-combatants, and community leaders—ensuring that the sample accurately represented local population characteristics. The distribution of respondents by LGA was as follows: Maiduguri (110), Jere (70), Konduga (70), and Mafa (70), with conscious efforts to balance gender, age, and displacement status in each community sample. Enumeration teams, trained in ethical research conduct, administered face-to-face surveys, while translators facilitated communication in Hausa, Kanuri, and other local dialects as needed. The structured questionnaires captured demographic information; measured participation in peacebuilding using the Peacebuilding Engagement Scale (PBES); assessed attitudes toward ex-combatant reintegration via the Reintegration Acceptance Index (RAI); and evaluated trust in major stakeholders through the Community Trust Differential (CTD).

Qualitative Component: This study employed a robust qualitative approach, beginning with 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted among a diverse range of stakeholders, including officials from the Borno State Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement, traditional and religious leaders, NGO representatives, leaders of women's and youth organisations, and selected ex-combatants. Participants were purposively sampled from all four research areas, chosen for their involvement or influence in peacebuilding efforts. Complementing the interviews, six focus group discussions (FGDs) were held: four with women's collectives and two with youth organisations. These FGDs took place across host communities, internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, and newly rebuilt villages within the selected local government areas. Each group comprised 4–7 participants, identified through community networks and local leaders, and discussions—held in participants' preferred languages—lasted 30–40 minutes, delving into barriers to reintegration, exclusion, stigma, and community-driven peacebuilding strategies. Prior to widespread data collection, a pilot was conducted to ensure cultural

appropriateness and clarity of the research tools. All FGDs and interviews were audio-recorded with consent, then transcribed and translated into English, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the qualitative data.

Ethical approval for this study was sought, ensuring compliance with established standards for research involving human subjects. The research process prioritised voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent from all respondents, and upholding confidentiality throughout. Considering the sensitive nature of post-conflict contexts, steps were taken to minimise potential risks, including offering referrals for psychosocial support, permitting participants to withdraw at any time, and ensuring the anonymity of all responses.

Data Analysis: For qualitative data—including interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)—a thematic analysis was conducted following¹⁶ framework. The coding process began with deductive codes aligned with research aims (e.g., “barriers to reintegration,” “women’s agency,” “community trust”), while additional codes emerged inductively from detailed transcript review. Manual coding by two analysts was cross-checked with software-assisted coding via NVivo to enhance reliability and validity. Dominant, recurring themes were synthesised to highlight both convergent and divergent patterns across subgroups. Throughout analysis, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated, allowing for triangulation of results and ensuring robust, comprehensive insight into response patterns on peacebuilding involvement, trust, and reintegration. The study cohort (n=320) included Maiduguri (110), Jere (70), Konduga (70), and Mafa (70) respondents, with a demographic breakdown of 60% IDPs, 23% returnees, 11% community leaders, and 6% ex-combatants; 57% female and 43% male, with broad age and educational representation. This analytic approach ensured each method was rigorously matched to both the type and purpose of the data collected, addressing statistical reliability for quantitative analysis and contextual nuance for qualitative insights, while maintaining methodological coherence and avoiding contradictory sampling or analysis procedures.

Each scale’s Total Weight Value (TWV) was calculated as:

$$TWV = \sum_{i=1}^n (N_i \times W_i)$$

¹⁶ Creswell, J. W., A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research (Sage Publications, 2021).

And each of the Computed Trustworthiness Degree (CTD) was calculated as:

$$CTD = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (N_i \times W_i)}{5 \times N_{total}}$$

Where:

- N_i is the number of respondents assigning a particular score to a variable,
- W_i is the associated Likert weight.
- N_{total} is the total number of raters.

For example, the CTD for each respondent group was computed by dividing the TWV of all ratings received by the product of the highest Likert score (5) and the total number of raters, yielding an index ranging from 1 (no trust) to 5 (high trust)

A CTD closer to 5 indicates greater expressed trust towards the group assessed; a lower value signals prevalent distrust. Other indices (such as PBES and RAI) were measured and interpreted in the same manner. Associations between attitudes and respondent attributes (gender, age, displacement status, education, marital status) were further explored using Chi-square tests for significance¹⁶.

Qualitative Analysis:

For qualitative data—including interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)—a thematic analysis was conducted following Creswell’s (2021) framework. The coding process began with deductive codes aligned with research aims (e.g., “barriers to reintegration,” “women’s agency,” “community trust”), while additional codes emerged inductively from detailed transcript review. Manual coding by two analysts was cross-checked with software-assisted coding via NVivo to enhance reliability and validity. Dominant, recurring themes were synthesised to highlight both convergent and divergent patterns across subgroups. Throughout analysis, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated, allowing for triangulation of results and ensuring robust, comprehensive insight into response patterns on peacebuilding involvement, trust, and reintegration. The study cohort (n=320) included Maiduguri (110), Jere (70), Konduga (70), and Mafa (70) respondents, with a demographic breakdown of 60% IDPs, 23% returnees, 11% community leaders, and 6% ex-combatants; 57% female and 43% male, with broad age and educational representation. This analytic approach ensured each method was rigorously matched to both the type and purpose of the data collected, addressing statistical reliability for quantitative analysis and contextual

nuance for qualitative insights, while maintaining methodological coherence and avoiding contradictory sampling or analysis procedures.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section presents and interprets the primary findings from the survey of 320 respondents affected by the insurgency in Borno State. The results are discussed thematically, with specific reference to descriptive and inferential statistics. For clarity and transparency, reference will be made to Table 1 (Demographic Profile of Respondents) as each variable is introduced. Understanding the demographics of the respondents is integral to appreciating the context and implications of peacebuilding participation in Borno State. As displayed in Table 1, the sample comprised an even gender distribution, with females forming a slight majority (56.9%). The age profile skewed toward young and middle-aged adults, reflecting the intergenerational impact of displacement and conflict. Educational attainment was lowest among those with no formal schooling (14.1%) but highest for those with primary (40.0%) and secondary education (29.4%), suggesting a literate base for peacebuilding engagement.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Item	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	138	43.1
	Female	182	56.9
Total		320	100.0
Age	Less than 21	48	15.0
	21 - 30	92	28.7
	31 - 40	88	27.5
	41 and above	92	28.8
Total		320	100.0
Marital Status	Single	88	27.5
	Married	204	63.8
	Widowed	19	5.9
	Seperated/Divorced	9	2.8
Total		320	100.0
Displacement Status	IDP	192	60.0
	Returnee	74	23.1
	Ex-combatant	18	5.6
	Community leader	36	11.3

Total		320	100.0
Education Level	No formal	45	14.1
	Primary	128	40.0
	Secondary	94	29.4
	Tertiary	53	16.6
Total		320	100.1

Source: Field survey, 2024

Peacebuilding Participation and Reintegration Attitudes

Analysis of community involvement in peacebuilding shows that 77.5% of surveyed participants reported engagement in activities such as local dialogue fora, communal rebuilding, or support initiatives. Notably, participation was especially prevalent among women and widowed respondents, highlighting the critical agency and resilience among those most affected by loss and displacement. Results from the Peacebuilding Engagement Scale (PBES, mean score = 3.85 on a 5-point scale) further suggest that attitudes toward community and institutional participation are generally positive, though tempered by prevailing insecurity. Women’s participation, often organised in groups, was slightly higher, potentially reflecting both need and collective survival strategies.

Examining the Reintegration Acceptance Index (RAI), the distribution of attitudes toward ex-combatant reintegration was diverse. 21.9% registered high acceptance (score 5), 54.1% reported moderate acceptance (scores 3–4), while 24.0% expressed reluctance or distrust (scores 1–2). The reluctance among a notable fraction of the community can be linked to persistent trauma, concerns over security, and disruption of family life due to insurgency-related violence. A Chi-square test was applied to determine if demographic variables were statistically associated with attitudes toward reintegration. Results indicated significant relationships: Gender ($\chi^2 = 8.54, p < 0.05$): Women—especially widows—were marginally more supportive of ex-combatant reintegration. Displacement status ($\chi^2 = 11.73, p < 0.01$): IDPs and returnees showed greater openness, possibly due to shared vulnerability, compared to community leaders and ex-combatants. Education level ($\chi^2 = 12.03, p < 0.05$): Higher educational attainment correlated with more positive attitudes toward reintegration, underscoring the role of social awareness and access to information.

In assessing community trust (Community Trust Differential - CTD), mean scores for trust in ex-combatants were considerably lower (CTD = 2.94) than for community leaders (CTD = 4.45) and returnee civilians (CTD = 3.89). This skepticism persisted across genders and ages, though women and the widowed cohort recorded slightly higher trust levels (CTD = 3.14). The lower trust in ex-combatants highlights enduring anxieties regarding personal safety, social stability, and challenges in re-establishing relationships fractured by conflict.

The demographic reality revealed by the marital status calibration reflects the pronounced social consequences of insurgency: widespread widowhood, family separation, and social disintegration. This context must inform peacebuilding interventions—widows and separated individuals, in particular, constitute a vulnerable but potentially transformative segment of peace processes. Participation rates in peacebuilding, while encouraging, should be viewed considering barriers faced by subgroups—especially the less educated and those still experiencing trauma or stigmatisation. The statistical associations between demographic factors and reintegration attitudes suggest that tailored interventions, acknowledging gender, education, and displacement history, could foster greater community acceptance and resilience. Initiatives aimed at building trust, particularly between ex-combatants and the civilian population, must address underlying fears and histories of harm. Finally, these results confirm that “one-size-fits-all” approaches are inadequate. Effective peacebuilding in Borno State requires nuanced, contextually conscious strategies that address the legacies of gender-based violence, loss, and separation—while building on the documented agency and resourcefulness of survivors.

RESULTS

Impact of Insurgency on Peacebuilding Efforts

Social Fragmentation and Community Trust: Long-term displacement and trauma have deeply fragmented social ties. Many IDPs, now in protracted exile in both formal and informal camps, report feeling disconnected from ancestral homes and skeptical of return guarantees³. Family separation and the rise of unaccompanied children present ongoing challenges for social cohesion and inter-generational transmission of peace values¹⁷. **Economic Devastation and Peacebuilding:** Loss of agricultural productivity and trade has fostered widespread reliance on humanitarian aid. Focus group narratives stress that until economic dignity is restored—via employment,

¹⁷ Oluwafemi, A. J., and U. T. Okpara, “Trauma, Identity, and Peacebuilding among Internally Displaced Persons in Borno State,” *Peace and Conflict Studies in Africa* 14, no. 1 (2023): 82–102.

restored markets, and infrastructure—peacebuilding will remain tenuous¹⁸. According to UNDP Nigeria (2022), DDR graduates cite lack of economic opportunity as their greatest fear for relapse into violence. Political Disillusionment and Weaknesses in Local Governance: The delegitimisation of both government and traditional authority has created a “governance deficit.” Survey data indicate a crisis of trust: 64% of respondents had little or no faith in local government’s ability to protect or reintegrate returnees. Conflicts between formal authorities and vigilante groups over control and resource allocation sometimes escalate local tensions⁸.

Evaluation of Reintegration Programmes for Ex-Combatants

Structure and Evolution of DDR in Borno: The “Operation Safe Corridor” and UN-supported DDR programmes have demobilised over 3,500 fighters between 2020 and 2023⁴. Programmes typically involve basic education, vocational training, psychosocial counselling, and civic orientation. **Community Reception and Challenges:** While government sources hail the programmes’ success, local communities remain wary. Asaju & Adie (2023) observe that lack of consultation and community-led justice processes has resulted in social distance and suspicion. Interviews reveal deep ambivalence: one resident said, “We want peace, but how can we trust those who destroyed our families?”. **Economic and Psychosocial Support:** Funding limitations have meant that vocational placements or microgrant programmes reach only a fraction of returnees. Moreover, the psychological needs of ex-combatants are often inadequately addressed. “We are taught tailoring, but who will buy clothes when people are hungry?” lamented an ex-combatant in a 2024 focus group. UNDP Nigeria (2022) stresses that multi-year support, including trauma management and employment, is essential for lasting reintegration.

The Role of Women in Post-Insurgency Peacebuilding

Women as Mediators and Providers: From 2020-2024, women in Borno have increasingly taken up roles as family providers, community organisers, and informal peace negotiators. Studies observe that women’s associations engage in local mediation, support the return of abductees, and facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants, especially children^{10,11}. **Barriers to Formal Inclusion:** Despite their critical roles on the ground, women are underrepresented in formal peace initiatives. Only 12% of local peace committees have female members, and few women are involved in local governance or DDR design¹⁵. Structural barriers—such as patriarchal politics, insecurity, and financial exclusion—limit women’s visibility and influence.

¹⁸ FAO, "Restoring Agricultural Livelihoods in Northeast Nigeria: A Progress Review," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023.

Promising Approaches: Current best practices, such as women-led agricultural collectives, trauma counselling groups, and community “listening sessions,” foster both healing and economic resilience¹³. International partners recommend scaling such models, providing direct funding and mentorship to women’s groups, and integrating their voices into transitional justice mechanisms⁴.

Community Voices, Justice, and the Dilemma of Amnesty

Restorative vs. Retributive Dynamics: Many communities demand not simply the absence of violence but the presence of justice. Focus groups express skepticism toward blanket amnesty without recognition of harm, truth-telling, and concrete restitution². Some local leaders advocate for hybrid transitional justice models drawing from both Islamic and customary systems, but with more open involvement of women and youth.

Trauma and Reconciliation: Persistent trauma—from the memory of violence to everyday uncertainty—hampers collective healing. The IOM (2024) reports that 68% of surveyed IDPs exhibited signs of PTSD. Psychosocial support initiatives remain underfunded and urban-centric, reaching only a fraction of those in need¹⁷.

Youth, Social Media, and New Peace Narratives: A growing number of youth-led initiatives, often using social media and radio, seek to counter hate speech and promote reconciliation. Examples include Borno Youth for Peace and “Radio Peace Borno,” which feature both survivors and ex-combatants telling their stories.

DISCUSSION

Peacebuilding in Borno State cannot be separated from the insurgency’s structural legacies—displacement, poverty, broken trust, and institutional decay. DDR programmes remain incomplete without broader community participation, ongoing economic investment, and integration of traditional and modern mechanisms⁹.

Survey and interview data corroborate the growing scholarly consensus: the future of peace in Borno is contingent on women’s empowerment, both informally and at the institutional level¹³. Peace becomes more sustainable when women shape narratives, mediate disputes, and provide daily leadership at household and community levels¹⁵. External aid must be aligned with local priorities and voices. As UNDP Nigeria (2022) observes, community-based justice, economic dignity, and inclusive governance are

the foundations for durable peace. International actors should empower local leaders, particularly women and youth, to own and adapt peace processes to evolving realities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study reveals that sustainable peacebuilding in Borno State requires more than well-meaning interventions; it demands a radical reorientation toward inclusive, locally owned, and context-driven approaches. While disarmament, community reconciliation, humanitarian aid, and women's peace initiatives have made important strides, they remain undermined by persistent violence, fragmented governance, socioeconomic deprivation, and the underrepresentation of women and youth. The findings demonstrate that initiatives succeed where they actively engage communities—especially women and the most marginalised—in decision-making and incorporate both justice and psychosocial healing as integral elements. Without addressing the roots of distrust, poverty, and exclusion, peacebuilding efforts risk reinforcing, rather than healing, the wounds of displacement and conflict. True progress in Borno will depend on adaptive policies that systematically empower local actors, invest in women's leadership, and align external resources with grassroots priorities. Only through such holistic engagement can trust be rebuilt, resilience fostered, and a durable foundation for peace established in the region.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Community-Driven DDR and Reintegration Programmes**
Revise Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) efforts to be more inclusive and participatory by actively involving host communities, IDPs, and returnees in the design and monitoring of these programmes. Ensure that DDR strategies provide sustained livelihood opportunities and access to psychosocial support, addressing both the economic and emotional needs of ex-combatants and residents. Community buy-in and transparent communication should be foundational to improving trust and effective reintegration^{9, 4}.
2. **Institutionalise Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Leadership**
Formalise the inclusion of women at all levels of peacebuilding—from local peace committees to high-level strategy and programme design. Allocate dedicated funding, mentorship, and decision-making power to women's associations and collectives, ensuring their perspectives shape both reconciliation and development initiatives.

Prioritise women's participation in DDR, community justice, and economic recovery programmes to harness the resilience they consistently demonstrate^{13,15}.

3. **Integrate Trauma-Informed Approaches and Expand Psychosocial Support**

Scale up accessible, community-based psychosocial care for IDPs, returnees, ex-combatants, and other vulnerable groups. Invest in training local counsellors, scaling trauma-healing circles, and supporting community "listening sessions" and safe spaces—especially for women and children. Incorporate trauma awareness into all peacebuilding programming to address persistent PTSD and promote sustainable healing^{3,17}.

4. **Promote Inclusive Community Justice and Reconciliation Mechanisms**

Develop hybrid justice models that combine elements of traditional, religious, and statutory practices to address the diverse needs for truth, restitution, and forgiveness. Facilitate structured community dialogues involving survivors, perpetrators, and marginalised groups (especially women and youth) to foster ownership, address wounds, and reduce tendencies toward exclusionary "amnesty-only" approaches^{2,8}.

5. **Restore Economic Dignity and Local Livelihoods**

Prioritise economic recovery as foundational to peace by investing in livelihood restoration, vocational training, agricultural rehabilitation, and youth employment. Support women-led cooperatives, market linkages for small producers, and sustainable micro-grant programmes that reach both host and displaced populations. Coordinate economic development efforts to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and foster resilient, self-reliant communities^{18,4}.

6. **Foster Data Disaggregation, Evidence-Based Planning, and Youth Engagement**

Require all peacebuilding partners—including government, NGOs, and donors — to collect, disaggregate, and regularly analyse data by gender, age, educational status, and displacement category. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to identify which groups are reached and which remain excluded. Concurrently, support youth-driven peace narratives through investment in social media, radio, and creative platforms, building the capacity of young people as peace ambassadors and digital storytellers^{17,15}.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or affiliations that could have appeared to influence the conduct, interpretation, or presentation of this research. All data collected and analysed in this study were used solely for academic purposes. The research was conducted independently, without any undue influence from external organisations, donors, government agencies, or non-governmental bodies operating in Borno State, Nigeria.

All respondents participated voluntarily, and ethical protocols were strictly followed to ensure objectivity, confidentiality, and impartiality throughout the study. The authors affirm that the findings and recommendations presented herein are the result of rigorous, impartial analysis and do not serve the personal interests of any individual, group, or organisation. If any potential conflicts arise in the future, the authors are committed to full disclosure in the interest of academic integrity.

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