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Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Benue State: Implications of Economic Challenges on Sustainable Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

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Abstract

Nigeria is endowed with rich natural and human resources, but the country faces significant economic challenges that have profound implications for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Multiple challenges, such as high levels of inequality, unemployment, illiteracy, displacement, banditry, and criminality, have exacerbated poverty and reinforced social unrest, intergroup tensions, and divisive politics amongst the various groups. These economic challenges remain a major obstacle to sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State, where persistent insecurity, poverty, unemployment, displacement, and weak rural infrastructure continue to undermine livelihoods and social stability. This study examined the implications of economic challenges for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State, with particular focus on the Sankera axis comprising Logo, Ukum, and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. Primary data were collected through Key Informant Interviews with 52 purposively selected respondents, while secondary data were obtained from scholarly publications, government reports, and other relevant documentary sources. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed descriptively, using the Human Development Theory to buttress its arguments. The findings revealed that persistent insecurity, economic deprivation, poor infrastructure, and limited livelihood opportunities reinforce conflict dynamics and weaken peacebuilding efforts. Respondents further identified employment generation, agricultural support, rural infrastructure development, equitable resource management, and community participation as essential strategies for sustainable peace. The study contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that long-term economic development constitutes a fundamental condition for sustainable peace rather than a consequence of it. The study recommends integrated economic development policies alongside security interventions. It concludes that sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State depend on expanding livelihood opportunities, strengthening local economies, and promoting inclusive development.

Keywords: Economic challenges, Conflict prevention, Inclusive development, Sustainable Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding.

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Introduction

Benue State, located in the middle belt region of Nigeria, is plagued by conflicts and social unrests ranging from communal conflicts, banditry, ethnic conflicts, kidnapping, cultism, and political violence to the devastating farmers/herders clashes rural communities. These have led to economic challenges, high rate of displacement, as well as human and economic losses. Most of these conflicts are driven by economic factors such as competition for land and other scarce resources, political or economic exclusion, poverty, unemployment, and other perceived injustices such extortion of farmers by banditry elements in some communities such as in theSankera axis, the perceived unwillingness of the government securities to protect the ruler the populace from herders attack and bandits etc.which has led to Vigilante youth mounting road blocks at the border corridors and other security prompt are where the government securities are expect have been to protect the communities from criminal elements and killer herders. These are some of the primary factors hindering sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in most parts of the State.

The State has experienced continual insecurity arising from communal clashes, farmer–herder conflicts, banditry, kidnapping, political violence, cult-related activities, and organised criminality. The cumulative effect of these conflicts has been widespread destruction of lives and property, large-scale displacement, declining agricultural productivity, and severe economic hardship. From December 2024 to date,over 510,000 people have supposedly been displaced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, further deepening the state's humanitarian and development challenges (Vande-Acka, 2025). Even though these conflicts are frequently portrayed in ethnic or religious terms, a growing body of evidence suggests that they are fundamentally rooted in economic realities, including competition over land and other productive resources, poverty, unemployment, political and economic exclusion, and perceived injustice (Amnesty International, 2025). Consequently, economic hardship is not just aproduct of conflict in Benue State; it also one of its major drivers by intensifying competition for scarce resources, deepening grievances, and weakening the capacity of both state and traditional institutions to prevent and manage violent disputes.

Sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding extend beyond the cessation of violence to encompass the creation of social, political, and economic conditions that reduce the likelihood of renewed conflict. They require responsive institutions, equitable access to opportunities and resources, inclusive governance, and mechanisms capable of addressing grievances before they escalate into violence. Where these conditions are absent, poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, and weak governance create an environment in which conflict becomes increasingly difficult to prevent and peace progressively more difficult to sustain. In Benue State, recurring violence has exposed the limitations of security-centred responses that focus primarily on containing immediate outbreaks while paying insufficient attention to their underlying economic causes. As livelihoods deteriorate and public confidence in state institutions declines, communities increasingly rely on informal security arrangements and self-help mechanisms, thereby reinforcing cycles of mistrust, retaliation, and instability.

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Addressing these structural economic conditions is therefore essential to achieving durable peace and strengthening long-term conflict prevention. Yet, important questions remain regarding the specific economic challenges confronting conflict-affected communities, the extent to which these challenges shape conflict dynamics, and the implications they hold for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the state.

The Sankera axis, comprising Logo, Katsina-Ala, and Ukum Local Government Areas, provides a compelling context for examining these questions. For more than a decade, the area has experienced persistent insecurity characterised by recurrent farmer–herder conflicts, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence, resulting in extensive displacement, livelihood disruption, and economic decline. These challenges are sustained by both grievances arising from poverty, unemployment, and perceived marginalisation, and by greed associated with competition over land, political influence, and economic advantage. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 1.5 million people have been displaced across the axis during the prolonged conflict despite sustained interventions by government agencies and development partners (Iorbo et al., 2024; The ICIR, 2026). Although previous studies have examined the security, humanitarian, political, and socio-cultural dimensions of the Benue crisis, comparatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to identifying the major economic challenges affecting conflict-prone communities, explaining how these challenges influence conflict dynamics, and evaluating their implications for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding, particularly within the Sankera axis. This gap has constrained a comprehensive understanding of the economic foundations of protracted insecurity and has limited the development of policy responses that integrate economic development with peacebuilding initiatives.

Against this background, this study examines the implications of economic challenges for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, it identifies the major economic challenges affecting conflict prone communities, examines how these challenges influence conflict dynamics, assesses their implications for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and identifies policy measures capable of promoting durable peace, inclusive development, and long-term stability in the state. In providing an empirically grounded analysis of the relationship between economic conditions and conflict, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on sustainable peacebuilding in Benue State and other conflict-affected regions of Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Economic challenges

Economic challenges refer to structural and persistent conditions that constrain people's ability to secure sustainable livelihoods, participate productively in the economy, and improve their standard of living. These conditions commonly manifest in the form of poverty, unemployment, income inequality, inflation, weak infrastructure, food insecurity, declining agricultural productivity, and limited access to productive resources. Contemporary development scholarship increasingly treats such challenges as multidimensional rather than purely financial because they affect people's capabilities, choices, and resilience in the face of social and political shocks. The human development perspective argues

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that economic progress should be assessed not only through growth in national income but also through the expansion of people's opportunities, security, and well-being (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025). Fragile economies characterised by widespread deprivation and unequal access to resources often generate grievances that weaken public confidence in state institutions, intensify competition over scarce resources, and increase the likelihood of violent conflict. Economic challenges therefore represent both a development concern and a security concern, particularly in societies where livelihoods depend heavily on land and natural resources, as is the case in many agrarian communities across Benue State.

Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention refers to "diplomatic, developmental, and other actions taken to avoid the outbreak, escalation, or recurrence of violent conflict" (United Nations, 2011). Conflict prevention requires tackling grievances around indigeneity, land, and access to political power, and creating mechanisms for inter-group dialogue (United States Institute of Peace, 2012). It focuses on addressing structural, contiguous, and trigger causes of conflict before violence occurs, and also includes efforts to prevent relapse after peace agreements (Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997). Conflict prevention carnage the drivers of conflict before they emerge. In the purview of Benue State Conflict Prevention entails three major dimensionsStructuralPrevention: Addresses root causes such as poverty, inequality, exclusion, weak governance, and contested identities. The Direct/OperationalPrevention: are temporary measures applied when tensions are rising, such as early warning systems, mediation, diplomacy, and security interventions to de-escalate crises (Lund, 1996).Systemic Prevention: this includes building resilient institutions and norms that manage disputes peacefully. This includes. Alternative Dispute Resolution, inclusive political processes, independent judiciaries, and civil society engagement/dialogues (OECD, 2008).

Inclusive Development

Inclusive development is the process of ensuring that all groups of people, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from development" (UNDP, 2016). This entails total inclusion of all and sundry being carried along in the development policies on economic, social and political structure. It goes beyond GDP growth to emphasize equity, participation, and non-discrimination in economic, social, and political domains (Sen, 1999). For any society to experience inclusive development there must be; Economic Inclusion: Expanding access to jobs, markets, credit, and productive assets for all groups, including women, youth, and rural communities. Inclusive economic growth reduces grievances that fuel conflict (Ravallion, 2013).AlsoSocial Inclusion which entails Ensuring access to basic services such as education, health, water, and social protection without discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or origin (World Bank, 2013) must be visible. another vital ingredient of inclusive development is political inclusion aimed at enabling participation of all groups in decision-making, governance, and peace processes. It counters exclusionary practices like indigene-settler distinctions that marginalize “visitors” and minorities curtailing the grievances from political exclusion would frame discord that could lead to violent conflicts.

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Sustainable Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

Sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding signify continuous processes through which the structural causes of violence are addressed while institutions, communities, and governance systems are strengthened to prevent the recurrence of conflict. Contemporary peacebuilding extends beyond military responses or negotiated ceasefires to include inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, economic recovery, social cohesion, and the restoration of public trust in state institutions. Recent international policy frameworks recognize that durable peace is closely linked to development outcomes because societies marked by persistent poverty, exclusion, unemployment, and institutional fragility remain vulnerable to recurring violence even after active hostilities have subsided. Effective conflict prevention therefore requires sustained investment in livelihoods, education, infrastructure, social protection, and accountable governance along mechanisms for dialogue and reconciliation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025; UNDP, 2022). Within the perspective of Benue State, sustainable peace depends not only on improving security responses but also on reducing the economic vulnerabilities that fuel grievances, deepen social divisions, and undermine durable peacebuilding efforts.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Recent empirical research increasingly conceptualizes the relationship between poverty and conflict as mutual rather than linear, recognizing that one reinforces the other over time. Fuseini et al. (2025) conducted a scoping review of studies on the poverty–conflict nexus across Sub-Saharan Africa using the PRISMA-ScR framework and found consistent evidence that violent conflict deepens poverty through the destruction of productive assets, disruption of markets, and displacement of populations, while persistent poverty increases the likelihood that unresolved grievances escalate into violence. Akar et al. (2024) extended this line of inquiry by examining whether multidimensional poverty indicators could predict the onset of intrastate armed conflict. Their findings demonstrated that deprivation in health, education, and living standards possesses significant predictive value, suggesting that multidimensional poverty functions not only as a consequence of conflict but also as an early warning indicator of instability. Okunlola and Okafor (2022) examined the poverty–conflict relationship across Africa between 1980 and 2015 and established that internal conflicts wield a more severe and lasting effect on poverty than interstate wars because they directly undermine livelihoods, public services, and household welfare. Although these studies establish a strong relationship between economic deprivation and violent conflict, their analyses remain largely continental or cross-national and therefore provide limited insight into how these dynamics operate within conflict-prone sub-national contexts such as Benue State.

Evidence from regional studies further demonstrates that economic decline and insecurity reinforce each other through multiple channels. Shettima et al. (2023) analysed three decades of data from resource-rich Sub-Saharan African countries and reported that conflict-related fatalities and population displacement significantly reduced electricity generation; access, and consumption, thereby constraining economic recovery long after active violence had subsided. Communities affected by conflict consequently face concurrent losses in agricultural production, infrastructure,

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markets, and essential public services, creating conditions in which recovery becomes increasingly difficult. Similar observations emerge from broader studies of fragile and conflict-affected settings, where weakened infrastructure, declining investment, and restricted livelihood opportunities have been shown to prolong economic vulnerability and increase the risk of renewed violence. These findings suggest that economic recovery and peacebuilding should be pursued as mutually reinforcing processes rather than as separate policy objectives. Nevertheless, regional analyses rarely capture the local institutional, socio-economic, and governance conditions through which economic hardship shapes conflict dynamics within individual communities.

Nigerian studies provide stronger evidence of the mechanisms linking economic challenges to violent conflicts. Abidoye and Calì (2021) exploited income shocks across Nigerian states. They found that declining household income significantly increased the incidence of localised violence, particularly in agrarian communities where livelihoods depend heavily on agricultural production. George et al. (2021) examined the impact of Fulani militia attacks on agriculture and reported substantial reductions in farm output and dietary diversity as insecurity discouraged cultivation and disrupted food production. Nwajiuba et al. (2023) investigated the socio-economic consequences of farmer–herder conflict in Anambra State and found that violence reduced household income, restricted access to farmland and markets, weakened tenure security, and prolonged economic recovery well beyond the immediate conflict period. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that economic hardship and conflict in Nigeria operate as mutually reinforcing processes rather than as isolated events. Their emphasis, however, remains either national in scope or confined to states outside Benue, leaving important questions regarding the nature of economic challenges and their implications for conflict prevention and peacebuilding within the Sankera axis insufficiently explored.
Empirical evidence from Benue State confirms the pivotal of economic factors in sustaining violent conflict while revealing important gaps in existing scholarship.

Nwankwo (2025) examined farmer–herder conflict along the Benue–Nasarawa borderland and found that perceptions of injustice arising from crop destruction, cattle losses, and unequal compensation were more influential in escalating violence than resource scarcity alone. Achem and Aderinto (2025) investigated the implications of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law through interviews with farmers, pastoralists, and internally displaced persons. Their findings revealed contrasting perceptions of the legislation, with farming communities associating it with improved livelihood protection, whereas pastoralists viewed it as a source of exclusion and economic insecurity. Iorbo et al. (2024) documented the experiences of internally displaced persons in Benue State and found that displacement extended beyond the loss of farmland to include diminished access to education, healthcare, religious institutions, social networks, and other community resources essential for long-term recovery. Existing studies have concentrated primarily on farmer–herder relations, displacement, land disputes, and policy responses. Comparatively little attention has been given to examining how communities within the Sankera axis perceive economic challenges as obstacles to sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding or to identifying the economic

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interventions considered most capable of promoting durable peace. This study addresses this gap through evidence drawn from stakeholders across Logo, Katsina-Ala, and Ukum Local Government Areas.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Human Development Theory propounded by Mahbub ul Haq and enriched by the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen, which was later adopted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a framework for assessing human progress beyond economic growth (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2025). The theory contends that development should be understood as the expansion of people's capabilities, freedoms, and opportunities to live productive, healthy, and meaningful lives rather than simply as an increase in national income. Access to education, healthcare, employment, productive resources, and social participation is therefore regarded as fundamental to both human well-being and social stability. A major strength of the theory lies in its holistic understanding of development, which links economic conditions directly to social cohesion, security, and sustainable peace. Rather than treating conflict solely as a security problem, it explains how persistent poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion weaken individual and community resilience, intensify grievances, and create conditions in which violence becomes more likely. This broader conception of development makes the theory particularly relevant for analysing conflicts in agrarian societies where livelihoods, access to land, and economic opportunities significantly influence social relations and community stability.

Despite its analytical value, Human Development Theory has attracted several criticisms. Evans (2002) argues that the theory gives limited attention to the influence of political institutions, governance structures, and unequal power relations in determining access to opportunities and resources. Nussbaum (2000) also observes that the capability approach places considerable emphasis on individual agency, which may not fully capture the communal values and collective decision-making processes that shape access to land, livelihoods, and social support in many African societies. Furthermore, the theory offers only a partial explanation for conflicts driven by political manipulation, organised criminality, or elite economic interests, even where improvements in human development have occurred. These limitations, however, do not weaken its suitability for the this study because its principal concern is the relationship between economic deprivation and human well-being, which corresponds directly with the objectives of this research. Human Development Theory therefore provides an appropriate analytical lens for identifying the major economic challenges confronting communities in Benue State, examining how these challenges influence conflict dynamics, assessing their implications for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and identifying socio-economic interventions capable of promoting durable peace and inclusive development in the Sankera axis.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to provide an in-depth understanding of the implications of economic challenges for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore the experiences, perceptions, and

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insights of stakeholders regarding the relationship between economic hardship and conflict dynamics, issues that cannot be adequately captured through numerical analysis alone. The study was conducted in the Sankera axis of Benue State, comprising Logo, Ukum, and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas, which have experienced recurrent farmer–herder conflicts, banditry, communal violence, and widespread displacement over the years. Primary data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) using a semi-structured interview guide administered to 52 purposely selected participants across ten wards within the three Local Government Areas. Five participants were drawn from each of the eight wards, while two wards contributed six participants each, resulting in a total sample of 52 respondents.

Participants were selected because of their direct knowledge and experience of the economic and security conditions in their communities and included traditional rulers, community leaders, farmers, women and youth leaders, religious leaders, local government officials, security personnel, and representatives of civil society organisations. The sample size was determined through the principle of thematic saturation, were exclusively conducted. Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, policy documents, reports of development agencies, and relevant publications from non-governmental organisations and internet sources to complement the primary evidence. Data generated from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data before meaningful statements were recorded and organised into broader themes reflecting recurring patterns relating to poverty, unemployment, livelihood insecurity, resource competition, challenges of governance, social exclusion, and peacebuilding. These themes were reviewed and developed through contineous comparison across the interviews before being interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study and the Human Development Theory.

Results

This section presents the empirical evidence generated from the field study before any interpretation or comparison with previous studies is undertaken. The findings are based on fifty-two Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted across ten wards in the three Local Government Areas that constitute the Sankera axis of Benue State: Logo, Ukum, and Katsina-Ala. The presentation follows the objectives of the study, beginning with the demographic profile of the respondents and proceeding to the major outcomes from the interviews concerning economic challenges, conflict dynamics, sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and government responses to the security and economic situation in the study area.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Local Government Area, Ward, and Gender

L.G.A.	Ward	Female	Male	Total
Ukum	Kundav	2	3	5
Ukum	Uyam	3	3	6
Ukum	Mbatian	2	4	6
Ukum	Borikyo	4	1	5

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Ukum	Mbazun	2	3	5
Ukum	Ityuluv	2	3	5
Ukum	Aterayange	3	2	5
Logo	Gbeji	2	3	5
Katsina-Ala	Gbishe	0	5	5
Katsina-Ala	Gbor	3	2	5
Total		**22**	**30**	**52**

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Major Economic Challenges Affecting Communities in Benue State

The interviews revealed four interrelated economic challenges affecting communities across the Sankera axis: persistent insecurity, widespread poverty and unemployment, inadequate rural infrastructure, and limited agro-processing capacity. Respondents consistently identified insecurity as the greatest constraint because it has prevented farmers from accessing their farmlands, disrupted agricultural production, reduced household incomes, and increased food insecurity. Participants also reported that poor road networks, particularly during the rainy season, have restricted access to markets and essential services, while the absence of agro-processing facilities has compelled farmers to sell agricultural produce at relatively low prices to traders from outside the area. Youth unemployment emerged as another recurring concern, with respondents observing that the lack of economic opportunities has intensified hardship among young people. A participant explained:"We have fertile land, but we cannot farm it.

Sometimes you prepare your farm and hear that armed men have entered the area. Everybody runs for safety. If farming stops, hunger follows." (Participant 04, Farmer, Logo LGA). Another respondent attributed the worsening economic conditions to unemployment:"Most of our young people have finished school but remain unemployed. Once people cannot feed themselves or support their families, frustration begins to grow and some result to subscribing to crime for livlihood." (Participant 11, Youth Leader, UkumLGA)Concerns about infrastructure were equally prominent. A community leader observed:"The roads are almost impassable during the rainy season. Buyers no longer come to purchase our produce, and transporting food to the markets costs more than what many farmers earn." (Participant 18, Community Leader, Katsina-Ala LGA). Similarly, another participant remarked:"We harvest yam, cassava and rice, yet there are no processing factories here. Traders come from outside, buy cheaply and make the profit elsewhere." (Participant 23, Farmer, Ukum LGA). These accounts demonstrate that insecurity, unemployment, weak infrastructure, and inadequate investment have jointly constrained economic activities and weakened household livelihoods throughout the study area.

Economic Hardship and Conflict Dynamics

Respondents consistently linked economic hardship to the persistence of conflict within the Sankera axis. Three dominant pathways emerged from the interviews: competition over scarce productive resources, disruption of livelihoods through insecurity, and increasing vulnerability arising from poverty and unemployment. Participants explained

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that recurring attacks have forced many households to abandon ancestral farmlands, resulting in food shortages, declining agricultural production, and reduced market activity. Displacement, restricted movement, and limited access to markets were also identified as factors that deepen existing socio-economic vulnerabilities and sustain tension between communities.A traditional ruler described the relationship between deprivation and violence as follows: *"The problem is no longer only about land. Hunger has made people desperate, and desperation easily turns into violence."* (Participant 07, Traditional Ruler, Logo LGA). Another respondent observed: *"When young people stay idle for years without work, some become easy targets for criminal groups who promise quick money"* (Participant 15, Religious Leader, Ukum LGA). A women's representative explained the consequences of displacement on local livelihoods:*"Many families have abandoned their farms because of fear. When farming stops, markets also suffer because there is little to sell"* (Participant 29, Women's Leader, Katsina-Ala LGA). Another community elder commented: *"Every attack increases suspicion. People begin to see their neighbours as enemies instead of partners, and that affects both business and peaceful coexistence"* (Participant 33, Community Elder, Logo LGA).

In the course of the interviews, respondents portrayed economic deprivation and insecurity as mutually reinforcing conditions that continue to sustain conflict across the Sankera axis.

Economic Challenges and Sustainable Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

Participants generally agreed that sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying economic conditions confronting local communities. Poverty, unemployment, displacement, insecurity and the destruction of livelihoods were repeatedly described as factors limiting participation in dialogue, weakening trust in government institutions, and slowing reconciliation efforts. Respondents further noted that prolonged economic hardship increases resentment within affected communities while exposing unemployed youth to recruitment into criminal and armed groups. A civil society representative stated: *"People who cannot feed their families rarely think about peace meetings. Their first concern is survival."* (Participant 09, Civil Society Representative, Ukum LGA). A women's representative added:*"Some people lost their homes, farms and relatives during the crisis. Without rebuilding their livelihoods, reconciliation remains difficult"* (Participant 21, Women's Representative, Logo LGA)

Another respondent emphasised employment as a condition for sustainable peace: *"Peace cannot last where there are no jobs. Employment gives young people hope and keeps them away from violence"* (Participant 38, Local Government Official, Katsina-Ala LGA). Similarly, a community leader remarked: *"Government should not only send soldiers. Communities also need roads, schools, hospitals and support for farming if peace is to endure."* (Participant 42, Community Leader, Ukum LGA). The responses indicate that participants regarded economic recovery, livelihood restoration, and improved access to basic services as indispensable components of sustainable conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding.

Government Responses to Economic and Security Challenges

Respondents acknowledged that federal and state governments, together with

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humanitarian organisations and development partners, have implemented a range of interventions aimed at addressing insecurity and the associated economic challenges. The interventions identified during the interviews included dialogue and mediation between farmers and herders, deployment of security personnel to conflict-prone communities, youth empowerment and skills acquisition programmes, livelihood support initiatives, humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons, resource management measures, and plans for the resettlement of displaced communities. These interventions are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Government and Stakeholder Responses to Economic and Security Challenges in the Sankera Axis

Institution	Intervention	Nature of Intervention
Federal and State Governments	Dialogue and enforcement	Mediation committees between farmers and herders and enforcement of anti-open grazing laws
Federal and State Governments	Security deployment	Deployment of security personnel to vulnerable communities and prosecution of perpetrators
Benue State Government	Economic empowerment	Collaboration with the SPRiNGProgramme on job creation and skills acquisition
Benue State Government	Resource management	Measures aimed at reducing competition over land and other productive resources
Federal and State Governments	Development programmes	Youth empowerment, vocational training, rural road construction, healthcare and community development projects
Benue State Government	IDP resettlement	Development of a framework for the safe return and resettlement of internally displaced persons
Government, NGOs and Development Partners	Humanitarian assistance	Food distribution, healthcare services, educational support, relief materials, and livelihood assistance

Although respondents acknowledged these efforts, many considered them inadequate in addressing the underlying economic conditions responsible for recurring conflict.

One community leader observed: *"Security personnel are deployed after attacks, but people need protection before attacks happen"* (Participant 13, Community Leader, Logo LGA).

An internally displaced persons' representative remarked:*"Relief materials help for a few weeks, but families need farms, seeds and markets if they are to rebuild their lives"* (Participant 26, IDP Camp Representative, Katsina-Ala LGA).

Another participant commented: *"Government has introduced empowerment programmes, but only a small number of people benefit from them"* (Participant 35, Youth Representative, Ukum LGA).

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Similarly, a traditional ruler stressed the importance of collaborative governance: *"There should be stronger cooperation between government, traditional rulers and community members because security cannot be achieved by government alone"* (Participant 50, Traditional Ruler, Katsina-Ala LGA).The interviews indicate that while respondents recognised ongoing government and humanitarian interventions, they expressed the need for more sustained economic development initiatives capable of addressing the structural conditions that continue to fuel conflict within the Sankera axis.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the major economic challenges confronting communities in the Sankera axis include persistent entrenched insecurity, widespread poverty, youth unemployment, inadequate rural infrastructure, displacement from ancestral farmlands, poor market accessibility, and the absence of agro-processing industries. These challenges have substantially reduced agricultural productivity, household income, food security, and local economic activities throughout the study area. Respondents consistently reported that insecurity prevents farmers from cultivating their land, while poor road networks and the absence of local processing industries limit market access and reduce the value of agricultural produce. The findings therefore demonstrate that the economic difficulties experienced by communities are not limited to income deprivation but also reflect structural constraints that weaken livelihoods and economic resilience.

These findings are consistent with Fuseini et al. (2025), who reported that violent conflict destroys productive assets, disrupts markets, and deepens poverty across Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Okunlola and Okafor (2022) found that internal conflicts exert severe and long-lasting effects on livelihoods because they directly undermine household welfare and local economic systems. George et al. (2021) likewise established that insecurity in Nigeria significantly reduces agricultural production and food security through the disruption of farming activities, while Iorbo et al. (2024) found that displacement in Benue State deprives communities of access to farmland, education, healthcare, and other essential services. The present study extends these earlier findings by demonstrating that respondents also regarded poor rural infrastructure, weak market accessibility, and the absence of agro-processing industries as critical barriers to economic development within the Sankera axis. These findings support the Human Development Theory, which argues that development depends on expanding people's capabilities and productive opportunities rather than increasing income alone. Limited access to infrastructure, employment opportunities, markets, and productive resources weakens individual capabilities and community resilience, thereby increasing vulnerability to socio-economic instability. This finding implies that sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State require deliberate investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural value chains, employment creation, and livelihood development alongside conventional security interventions.

The study found that economic hardship significantly contributes to conflict dynamics through competition over scarce land and productive resources, disruption of farming activities, displacement of communities, declining commercial activities, and the recruitment of unemployed youth into criminal and armed

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groups. Respondents explained that insecurity destroys livelihoods, while poverty and unemployment increase frustration and create conditions that expose vulnerable individuals to criminal activities and violent conflicts. The findings therefore indicate that economic deprivation and insecurity reinforce one another, producing a self-perpetuating cycle of violence within the Sankeraaxis.These findings agree with Akar et al. (2024), who demonstrated that multidimensional poverty significantly predicts the occurrence of intrastate armed conflict because deprivation increases social vulnerability and instability. The findings also corroborate Abidoye and Calì (2021), who found that declining household income significantly increases the incidence of localised violence across Nigerian states, particularly in agrarian communities.

Likewise, Nwajiuba et al. (2023) reported that farmer–herder conflict reduces household income, restricts access to farmland and markets, and prolongs economic hardship beyond the period of active violence. Nwankwo (2025) similarly established that perceived economic injustice concerning land ownership, crop destruction, and compensation contributes substantially to the escalation of violent conflict within the Benue–Nasarawa borderland. Unlike previous studies, the present research demonstrates that respondents considered youth unemployment and prolonged displacement to be particularly significant mechanisms through which economic hardship sustains conflict within the Sankera axis. These findings are consistent with Human Development Theory, which explains that persistent deprivation of employment opportunities, productive assets, and social inclusion weakens human capabilities and increases the likelihood of conflict. This finding implies that sustainable conflict prevention cannot be achieved without reducing poverty, expanding livelihood opportunities, and addressing the structural economic conditions that continue to fuel violence in affected communities.

The study found that economic hardship undermines sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding by limiting community participation in peacebuilding initiatives, weakening trust in government institutions, increasing resentment among conflict-affected populations, prolonging displacement, weakening social cohesion, and reducing opportunities for reconciliation. Respondents consistently argued that meaningful peace cannot be sustained where people continue to experience poverty, unemployment, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.

Economic recovery, employment generation, restoration of farming activities, improved infrastructure, and equitable access to productive resources were widely perceived as essential conditions for durable peace.These findings support those of Shettima et al. (2023), who found that conflict significantly reduces access to infrastructure and public services, thereby slowing economic recovery and increasing the likelihood of renewed instability across Sub-Saharan Africa. Similar conclusions were reached by Iorbo et al. (2024), who observed that internally displaced persons in Benue State continue to face restricted access to livelihoods, education, healthcare, and social support long after displacement.

Achem and Aderinto (2025) also reported that sustainable peace in Benue requires interventions that protect livelihoods while addressing economic exclusion among affected populations. The present study advances existing knowledge by

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demonstrating that respondents regarded employment generation, agricultural revitalisation, improved rural infrastructure, and livelihood restoration as indispensable foundations for reconciliation and long-term peacebuilding within the Sankera axis. These findings strongly reinforce Human Development Theory, which maintains that expanding people's capabilities and productive opportunities strengthens social cohesion, reduces grievances, and enhances community resilience against violent conflict. This finding implies that sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be approached as a comprehensive development process in which economic recovery and social inclusion receive equal priority with security operations.

The study further found that although governments, humanitarian organisations, and development partners have implemented interventions such as security deployment, dialogue initiatives, humanitarian assistance, youth empowerment programmes, and plans for the resettlement of internally displaced persons, these interventions have produced only limited results because they concentrate primarily on emergency response rather than durable economic transformation.

Respondents consistently identified employment creation, agricultural support, rural infrastructure development, establishment of agro-processing industries, equitable resource management, and stronger collaboration between government and local communities as the most effective strategies for promoting sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding.These findings agree with Achem and Aderinto (2025), who found that sustainable peace interventions in Benue State require policies that simultaneously protect livelihoods and promote social inclusion among conflict-affected communities. They also support Shettima et al. (2023), who argued that economic recovery and infrastructure development should accompany peacebuilding because conflict and underdevelopment reinforce one another. Similarly, Fuseini et al. (2025) concluded that poverty reduction and livelihood expansion are fundamental to breaking the cyclical relationship between economic deprivation and violent conflict across Sub-Saharan Africa. The study extends previous empirical evidence by identifying the interventions that local communities themselves consider most sustainable, particularly employment generation, agricultural revitalisation, local agro-processing industries, improved rural infrastructure, equitable resource allocation, and inclusive community participation in development initiatives. These priorities align closely with Human Development Theory, which views development as the expansion of people's capabilities and opportunities to pursue productive and meaningful lives. Respondents therefore regarded long-term economic development as more sustainable than reliance on security deployments alone because it addresses the underlying socio-economic conditions that generate conflict rather than merely responding to its immediate consequences.

This finding implies that sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State require a shift from predominantly reactive security responses towards integrated economic development policies that strengthen livelihoods, expand opportunities, and build resilient communities capable of sustaining peace over the long term.

Conclusion

The study concludes that economic challenges constitute a major obstacle to

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sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State, particularly within the Sankera axis comprising Logo, Ukum, and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas. Persistent insecurity, poverty, unemployment, displacement, inadequate rural infrastructure, poor market access, and the absence of agro-processing industries have collectively weakened livelihoods, reduced agricultural productivity, intensified competition over scarce resources, and sustained cycles of violence and socio-economic deprivation. Evidence from the study further demonstrates that economic hardship and conflict reinforce one another, making security interventions alone insufficient to achieve lasting peace.

Respondents consistently emphasised that sustainable peace depends on restoring livelihoods, creating employment opportunities, improving rural infrastructure, strengthening agricultural value chains, promoting equitable resource management, and fostering greater collaboration between government, local communities, and development partners. Anchored in Human Development Theory, the study therefore concludes that durable peace in Benue State can only be achieved through integrated development strategies that expand people's capabilities, reduce socio-economic inequalities, and address the structural economic conditions that continue to fuel conflict.

Recommendations

The recommendations are derived directly from the findings of the study and are intended to address the economic factors that continue to undermine sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Benue State.

1. The Benue State Government, in collaboration with the Federal Government and development partners, should implement comprehensive economic revitalization programmes in conflict-affected communities. These programmes should prioritize employment creation, agricultural mechanisation, establishment of agro-processing industries, and improved market rural roads for rural access in order to reduce poverty, increase household incomes, and strengthen local economic resilience.
2. Government should address the economic drivers of conflict through integrated livelihood and security interventions. This should include protecting farming communities, restoring access to farmlands, supporting agricultural production, creating sustainable employment opportunities for young people, and strengthening local peace committees to prevent disputes over land and other productive resources from escalating into violence.
3. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes should incorporate long-term socio-economic development as a core strategy rather than relying primarily on security responses. Priority should be given to the rehabilitation of rural infrastructure, restoration of livelihoods, resettlement of internally displaced persons, expansion of education and healthcare services, and strengthening public confidence through inclusive governance and equitable distribution of development projects.
4. Federal and state governments, local authorities, humanitarian organisations, and development partners should establish a coordinated framework for implementing sustainable economic interventions in the Sankera axis. Such

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interventions should focus on employment generation, agricultural value-chain development, rural infrastructure improvement, community participation in development planning, and regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that economic recovery contributes directly to sustainable conflict prevention and lasting peace in Benue State.

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