

# REPORT

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## Multi-Level Approaches to Sustainable Peace in Nigeria's Middle Belt

### Key Findings from Evaluating Climate-Sensitive Peace Programming

October 2025



Centre for  
Humanitarian  
Dialogue

*Mediation for peace*

**WEATHERING RISK**  
PEACE PILLAR

adelphi   
RESEARCH

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The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar integrates climate and environmental security into peace programming in regions severely affected by conflict and climate risks. Led by adelphi in partnership with the Berghof Foundation, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the European Institute of Peace, the consortium has been implementing projects in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and the Bay of Bengal since 2022. These projects focus on the climate-environment-peace-security (CEPS) nexus, using climate and environmental considerations as entry points for consultations, dialogues and mediation. This flagship initiative is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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## Executive Summary

Since August 2022, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) has been implementing the project [Multi-Level Approaches for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria's Middle Belt](#) under the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar – a climate security partnership that integrates climate and environmental challenges into peace programming. The project aims to prevent and resolve violent natural resource and climate-related conflicts, and enhance security across Nigeria's Middle Belt, with a focus on Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states. To build resilience and promote sustainable peace, HD facilitates peace processes that provide platforms for dialogue and collaboration, resulting in inclusive, community-level natural resource-sharing agreements that incorporate climate adaptation measures.

To assess the outcomes and impact of the first two phases of the project (2022–24), HD collaborated with the Nigeria-based evaluation firm *Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment* (LITE-Africa) to conduct an outcome evaluation. The evaluation focused on the project's four dialogue processes: the Konshisha-Oju process (Benue State), the Awe-Azara process (Nasarawa State), the Benue statewide process and the cross-border process (Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states). The evaluation examined progress towards the project's key outcomes: (1) the implementation of inclusive natural resource-sharing agreements that integrate climate adaptation strategies, and (2) the establishment of functional peace infrastructures that support the implementation of these agreements.

## Key Evaluation Findings

### Outcome 1: Implementation of Inclusive Natural Resource-Sharing Agreements and Climate Adaptation Measures

The evaluation found that, in the Konshisha-Oju and Awe-Azara processes, the signing of climate-sensitive natural resource peace agreements has led to significant improvements in reducing violence, fostering cooperative resource management and improving livelihoods. Benefiting more than half a million people across Nigeria's Middle Belt, the agreements – and their ongoing implementation – have strengthened community resilience to climate change and reduced the risk of future conflict.

- **Reduced violence and enhanced cooperation:** The three HD-facilitated natural resource peace agreements signed in Konshisha and Oju, and Awe Local Government Areas (LGAs) have led to a significant reduction in violent clashes and a marked improvement in intercommunal relations, particularly between farmers and herders. Community members have reported greater interethnic understanding and engagement in collaborative activities. The agreements have also fostered a culture of dialogue, encouraging communities to prioritise peaceful conflict resolution over confrontation.
- **Improved natural resource management:** The peace agreements have enabled collaborative governance of key natural resources such as water, grazing areas and forests. Communities have established locally led committees to regulate resource access and use, including through rotational systems for accessing grazing areas and water sources. This cooperative approach has not only reduced resource-related disputes, but also promoted sustainable and equitable resource management.
- **Climate adaptation progress:** The inclusion of climate adaptation provisions in the peace agreements has encouraged communities to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices, such as soil conservation, crop rotation and the protection of pasture from overgrazing. Communities have also started establishing locally led land rehabilitation, afforestation and water conservation initiatives, building community resilience to climatic shocks.

- **Improved livelihoods:** Community members have reported that the reduction in violence and the establishment of cooperative resource management has significantly improved livelihoods. With conflicts subsiding, community-imposed movement restrictions have been lifted, enabling the reopening of one local market and restoring access to another. This revitalisation of economic activity has enabled farmers, traders and livestock owners to resume trade, improving food security and income opportunities.

Although still in their early stages, the evaluation found that the Benue statewide and cross-border processes provide an opportunity to scale up the local-level successes achieved in Konshisha and Oju, and Awe LGAs by developing broader frameworks for managing resource-based conflict. In Benue State, a key interim milestone has been the signing of a roadmap by 10 ethnic communities, outlining the proposed format and content of a formal dialogue process aimed at reaching a statewide agreement.

### Outcome 2: Functional Community and State Peace Infrastructures

The evaluation found that the peace infrastructures established or strengthened through the project are key to the implementation and sustainability of the Konshisha-Oju and Awe-Azara peace agreements. These structures play an important role in resolving disputes, managing tensions and fostering long-term social cohesion.

- **Functional community peace infrastructures:** In both the Konshisha and Oju, and Awe and Azara processes, local peace committees and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have been established or revitalised. These structures have played a critical role in mediating disputes, monitoring implementation of the agreements and promoting dialogue among community members. Their presence has contributed to sustained stability and effective conflict prevention at the grassroots level.
- **Strengthened role of traditional authorities in conflict resolution:** Traditional rulers have emerged as central actors in the implementation of the peace agreements. Their legitimacy, rooted in cultural and social authority, has allowed them to play a vital role in enforcing agreements and de-escalating tensions. In Awe and Azara, for example, traditional rulers have actively participated in raising awareness of the agreements and are widely regarded as credible mediators within their communities.
- **Improved collaboration with local government and institutions:** The peace processes have encouraged more active engagement from local government representatives and state-level institutions. Their participation has helped link community-level mechanisms with formal governance structures, increasing institutional support for and the sustainability of the peace agreements.

Additional learnings from the evaluation, and key recommendations for programming and donor support on climate-sensitive peacemaking, are presented in a corresponding [evaluation synthesis](#).

## Project Overview

Nigeria's Middle Belt – situated between the Sahel in the north and the forested regions in the south of the country – has long experienced intercommunity tensions over access to land and water resources. These conflicts, primarily between farmers and herders, have been exacerbated by a combination of factors, including population growth, the weakening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and the impacts of climate and environmental changes. In particular, climate-related desertification in northern Nigeria has driven significant population movement, while rising sea levels affecting the south of the country have exerted extreme pressure on natural resources. Together, these dynamics have intensified competition over water, land, fisheries and forests, both within and between livelihoods groups, contributing to heightened insecurity and violent conflict across the region. Compounded by long-standing political, economic and social divisions between communities, these conflicts have resulted in widespread displacement, significant economic hardship and the further deterioration of social cohesion in the Middle Belt.

Since August 2022, HD has been implementing the project [Multi-Level Approaches for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria's Middle Belt](#) under the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar initiative. The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar integrates climate and environmental security considerations into peace programming in regions severely affected by conflict and climate risks. Led by adelphi in partnership with the Berghof Foundation, HD and the European Institute of Peace, the consortium has been implementing projects in Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen and the Bay of Bengal since 2022. These projects address the climate-environment-peace-security nexus, using climate and environmental factors as entry points for consultation, dialogue and mediation. The flagship initiative is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

HD's project in Nigeria aims to prevent and resolve violent natural resource and climate-related conflicts, thereby contributing to increased security across the Middle Belt. Focusing on Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states, HD promotes resilience and sustainable peace by facilitating inclusive dialogue that brings together diverse stakeholders from conflicting groups and ethnic communities – including women, young people, traditional authorities and religious leaders. The project also supports local peace infrastructures and builds the capacity of stakeholders to prevent and manage resource-based conflicts.

In the first two phases of the project, HD focused on achieving two key outcomes:

1. The successful implementation of inclusive natural resource-sharing agreements, incorporating provisions on climate adaptation strategies;
2. The establishment of functional peace infrastructures to support the implementation and sustainability of these agreements.

These outcomes aim to provide a foundation for long-term peace and sustainable resource management, not only at the local level but also extending to regional and cross-border contexts. By focusing on reducing resource-based conflicts and promoting shared responsibility for resource management, HD seeks to help communities address the root causes of instability and strengthen resilience in the face of changing environmental conditions due to climate change.

## Evaluating Climate-Sensitive Peace Programming

The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar is building an [evidence base](#) on integrating climate and environmental security into peace processes. Between September 2024 and June 2025, consortium partners conducted outcome evaluations for each project to assess the impact of interventions to date. These evaluations examine multiple dimensions of peace, climate and environmental issues to better understand the value of integrated peace programming.

In Nigeria, HD focused on assessing its work and outcomes in the Middle Belt since August 2022. The evaluation was conducted in cooperation with *Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment* (LITE-Africa), a Nigeria-based evaluation firm that led data collection and analysis efforts. HD's Environment, Climate and Peacemaking Team, within the organisation's Mediation Support and Policy Unit (MESU), supported the evaluation design and analysis process, and prepared a summary of the findings.

HD's work covered by the evaluation includes four different dialogue processes:

- **The Konshisha-Oju Natural Resource Process (Benue State):** Focused on ending recurring intercommunal violence over natural resources, exacerbated by deforestation and the effects of climate change, between the Tiv and Iggede ethnic communities in Konshisha and Oju LGAs.
- **The Awe-Azara Process (Nasarawa State):** Aimed at creating the conditions for a successful pilot ranch in Awe LGA as part of the federal government's National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) by mediating between communities from Awe LGA, and the Emirs of both Awe and Azara.
- **The Benue statewide process:** Mediating between 10 communities across Benue State to resolve endemic farmer-herder conflicts by promoting sustainable natural resource management, peaceful coexistence, and climate adaptation and resilience mechanisms.
- **A cross-border process:** Seeking to secure a framework for farmer-herder cooperation between traditional rulers from Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states.

Analysing all four processes, the evaluation examined the extent to which HD has achieved its two primary outcomes, as outlined in the project logframe:

1. **Outcome 1 – Inclusive community-level natural resource-sharing agreements, containing climate adaptation measures, and a cross-border resource-sharing framework are implemented:** This outcome focuses on the extent to which the project has facilitated the implementation of sustainable natural resource-sharing agreements that incorporate climate adaptation strategies. The evaluation explored the tangible impacts of these agreements, including reduced conflict, improved access to resources and enhanced community resilience to climate change.
2. **Outcome 2 – Community and state peace infrastructures to support the implementation of inclusive natural resource-sharing agreements and the cross-border resource-sharing framework are functional:** This outcome focuses on the functioning of peace infrastructures established to support the implementation of the natural resource-sharing agreements. These infrastructures include mechanisms for conflict resolution, communication channels among stakeholders, and institutional support for peace initiatives at both the community and state levels.

In line with the project's objectives and Outcome 1, the evaluation paid particular attention to the facilitation and implementation of three natural resource-sharing agreements in Konshisha and Oju, and Awe LGAs, examining their contributions to community-level peace, economic recovery and resilience to climate change. The evaluation assessed progress and impact using the following learning indicators:

- Voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin;
- Lifting of movement restrictions;
- Changes in community members' livelihoods, such as the (re)opening of markets;
- Changes in the management of or access to specific natural resources, including forests and water points;
- Joint actions (as outlined in the agreement) to adapt to climate change and strengthen community resilience;
- Improved relationships between community members, as evidenced by, for example, joint activities and increased interaction between different ethnic groups.

These learning indicators were developed to complement the project logframe by providing more qualitative insights into how communities have engaged with and benefited from the agreements. This helps capture HD's contribution to both short-term recovery and long-term resilience in the affected communities.

Overall, the evaluation followed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, enabling a nuanced understanding of changing dynamics and relationships in conflict-affected contexts.

The evaluation drew on three key data sources:

1. **Key informant interviews (KIIs):** KIIs were conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including community leaders, local government officials, representatives from peacebuilding and development organisations, security personnel, and traditional rulers. A total of **84 KIIs** were conducted across the primary areas of intervention: Konshisha and Oju LGAs (Benue State), and Awe LGA (Nasarawa State).
2. **Focus group discussions (FGDs):** FGDs were held with community members directly impacted by the peace agreements and resource-sharing initiatives. A total of **20 FGDs** were conducted, ensuring representation from various community groups, including farmers, herders, women, young people and other key stakeholders.
3. **Secondary data:** The evaluation also relied on secondary data, particularly for the Benue statewide and cross-border processes. These sources included project reports, monitoring and evaluation data (e.g. logframes), and other relevant documents, such as copies of agreement and dialogue outcome documents.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the evaluation compared and crosschecked findings across multiple data sources. In addition, a two-day data analysis and evaluation workshop in Abuja, involving HD, adelphi and LITE-Africa, provided the project team with an opportunity to share additional insights.

## Key Evaluation Findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the evaluation, structured around the project's two primary outcomes, and insights from the different processes. Outcome 1 focuses on the implementation of inclusive natural resource-sharing agreements and climate adaptation measures, while Outcome 2 examines the progress made in establishing locally led peace infrastructures.

### Outcome 1: Implementation of Inclusive Natural Resource-Sharing Agreements and Climate Adaptation Measures

The evaluation found that, in both the Konshisha-Oju and Awe-Azara processes, the signing of climate-sensitive natural resource peace agreements led to significant reductions in violence, enhanced cooperation in resource management and improved livelihoods. The agreements and their ongoing implementation provide a foundation for long-term community resilience to climate change impacts and benefit more than half a million people across Nigeria's Middle Belt. While the Benue statewide and cross-border processes had yet to secure signed agreements at the time of the evaluation, HD has made notable progress in securing mandates, conducting climate-sensitive conflict analysis and laying the groundwork for the formal launch of the dialogue processes.

#### Konshisha-Oju Process

For decades, the Tiv and Iggede communities in Konshisha and Oju LGAs in Benue State experienced recurring violent conflicts, with particularly serious incidents in 1997, and between 2020 and 2022, resulting in hundreds of deaths, widespread displacement, and severe economic and social disruption. In November 2022, HD initiated an inclusive dialogue process involving traditional authorities, women, young people, religious leaders and community representatives. The process, preceded by months of consultations and conflict analysis, consisted of three formal sessions, during which the parties jointly drafted three formal outcome documents that informed the text of the final peace agreement. To ensure the inclusion of women and young people, HD established one Women and one Youth Steering Committee respectively – comprising members from each community – which led consultations, and articulated the perspectives of women and young people in the dialogue. The steering committees also contributed to the drafting of the formal outcome documents, ensuring that commitments were gender-responsive and inclusive.

The dialogue process culminated in the **signing of the Konshisha-Oju Natural Resource Peace Agreement in August 2023**, marking a significant milestone in the pursuit of lasting peace and stability in the region. The agreement addresses access to and shared management of water points, forests, farmland and markets, as well as the demarcation of contested boundaries. Provisions include specific commitments to climate adaptation and mitigating environmental degradation. The agreement also stipulated the establishment of a community peace committee responsible for implementing and monitoring the natural resource peace agreement (*see Outcome 2*).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Konshisha-Oju process, read the project's impact story: <https://weatheringrisk.org/en/impact-note/reaching-peace-agreement-nigerias-middle-belt-shared-natural-resource-use-climate>

### Reduction in Violence and Conflict Prevention

Since its signing, the peace agreement has led to a **notable reduction in violent incidents**, with about **78% of KII and FGD participants reporting a decline in violence**. Many community members noted that conflicts which previously might have escalated into violent confrontations are now being resolved through dialogue. As one resident of Konshisha explained: *"The agreement has helped reduce violence and brought some calm. While we still face challenges with land ownership disputes, we now have a structured way to discuss them without fighting."*

Several community members emphasised that HD's structured mediation framework and targeted mediation training have been essential in fostering this new culture of dialogue and early intervention. One religious leader noted: *"The training from HD has enabled us to recognise early signs of conflict, allowing us to intervene before violence erupts."*

The Konshisha-Oju peace agreement has also helped facilitate the voluntary return of IDPs to their places of origin. Prior to the mediation process, many families in Konshisha and Oju were forced to flee due to ongoing violence. Since the peace agreement, tensions have decreased in many areas, making it possible for IDPs to return. However, progress has been uneven. While some returnees in Konshisha have begun reclaiming abandoned farmland, security concerns persist in certain areas.

### Boundary Demarcation

A significant source of conflict prior to the peace process was the lack of clear land boundaries between farmers and herders. To address this, the peace agreement included provisions for a formal **boundary demarcation process**, which the Deputy Governor of Benue State and Chair of the Benue State Boundary Commission officially launched in June 2024, signalling high-level political commitment. HD has closely accompanied the process, and supported several meetings chaired by the Deputy Governor involving the Konshisha-Oju Peace Committee, ensuring that momentum and the goodwill of communities and traditional rulers for the demarcation process are sustained.

Participants highlighted that the successful completion of the boundary demarcation process is essential to prevent a reversal of the agreement's initial gains and ensure lasting peace. As one local leader stressed: *"The peace agreement will further lead to lasting peace when the government successfully demarcates the border lines."* The ongoing boundary demarcation process is seen as a critical step in resolving land ownership disputes and providing displaced families with the assurances needed for full resettlement. As the boundary demarcation process progresses, more displaced individuals are expected to return to their ancestral lands, knowing that their rights will be protected and respected.

Although the boundary demarcation process was still in its initial stages during the evaluation period, several participants expressed optimism about the process. One local leader explained: *"For the first time, we have an inclusive way to clarify land use. The discussions have started, and people now see a path forward to reducing disputes."*

### Progress in Natural Resource Management and Climate Adaptation

Following the peace agreement, communities have taken proactive steps to **collaboratively manage natural resources, reducing resource-related disputes and contributing to more sustainable resource use**. In Konshisha, for instance, inheritance-related land disputes were historically a major trigger of violence. When landowners passed away, family members often contested ownership, sometimes drawing in external allies, which led to tensions escalating into broader conflicts. Since the peace process, elders and traditional rulers have taken a more active role in mediating disputes. Rather than seeking full ownership, many **families now engage in rotational or joint farming practices**, reducing

competition and fostering cooperation. As one local farmer described: *"Before the peace talks, we settled land disputes with violence. Now, when disagreements arise, we meet under the village tree with elders and resolve them amicably."*

In Oju, a major source of conflict had been access to a lake, which serves as the primary source of drinking water and irrigation. Since the peace agreement, not only has access been restored, but community members have also established a **water management committee** to regulate use, ensure fair distribution and prevent excessive use. One resident explained:

*"We have a lake that we now share. During the crisis, access to it was completely cut off, leading to disputes and hardships. But after the peace agreement, we didn't just regain access – we took steps to manage it better. We even formed a committee to monitor water fetching and regulate tree felling so that resources are used sustainably."*

Several interviewees stated that their communities have explored more sustainable resource management practices, initiating discussions on **climate-smart farming practices, forest conservation strategies or rotational land-use agreements**. Elders and traditional rulers now also promote agroforestry and reforestation, recognising the role of environmental conservation in preventing future conflicts.

In Konshisha, for instance, indiscriminate logging previously caused severe soil degradation. However, since the signing of the peace agreement, local communities have increasingly embraced sustainable harvesting practices. As one farmer explained: *"We do not cut trees to the roots, so it does not break the soil."* Leaving tree stumps intact maintains soil stability, preventing erosion and preserving fertility for future agricultural use.

The Konshisha-Oju agreement also stresses the need for the sustained conservation of seasonal streams and rivers, for instance, through sinking boreholes that complement available water sources during dry seasons. In line with this, local communities have explored various traditional revitalisation efforts, such as encouraging vegetation that restores water volumes. Notably, a shared management approach has emerged since the signing of the peace agreement, which has reduced tensions and promoted equitable resource distribution. One respondent described this change: *"The communities were able to come together to share the water source and the trees in the forest areas for domestic and industrial use."*

Overall, these are critical climate adaptation and conflict prevention efforts, as sustainable and climate-smart resource management contributes to strengthening community resilience to climate change and thereby reduces the likelihood of future resource-based conflicts. While this initial progress is significant, the continued adoption of climate adaptation measures that align with the agreement's provisions will require additional technical expertise, local capacity and financial resources. HD has, therefore, been actively liaising with key government actors, and pursuing cross-sectoral partnerships with climate and development organisations. For example, HD has initiated discussions with the Benue State Ministry of Water Resources, Environment and Climate Change to explore opportunities for community-based capacity building in reforestation and water revitalisation.

### Improvements in Livelihoods and Lifting of Movement Restrictions

Interviewees reported that the peace process has contributed to **improving the economic well-being of community members**. With tensions easing, people can now move more freely, allowing farmers and herders to resume their economic activities without fear.

In Konshisha and Oju, the reopening of markets and the resumption of trade due to the improved security situation have been key drivers of economic recovery. As one community leader observed:

*"Before, conflicts over land and water would bring everything to a halt. Farmers wouldn't sell their produce and traders avoided certain routes for fear of violence. Now, we are beginning to see joint market activities again. People from different communities are coming together, selling their goods and engaging in shared resource management. It's not perfect yet, but the difference is clear."*

The effects of the Konshisha-Oju peace agreement are also evident in the recovery of agricultural activities. Farmers have resumed cultivating their land, while collaborative resource management efforts are contributing to better economic outcomes. As one farmer noted: *"The community is more prosperous now. Before, people were afraid to farm because of the tensions, but now they can cultivate their land and enjoy the fruits of their labour."*

Despite these positive developments, some challenges persist, particularly regarding market integration and road access. In some areas, roadblocks have been reinstated due to unresolved land demarcation issues, which restricts people's freedom to move. Nevertheless, the overall community outlook is positive. One respondent commented: *"The community is beginning to see renewed trade and resource-sharing initiatives are helping many sustain their livelihoods."*

### Improved Relationships between Community Members

In both Konshisha and Oju LGAs, community members reported greater interethnic understanding and an increase in collaborative activities resulting from the peace process.

One of the most notable developments has been the improvement in relations between Tiv and non-Tiv residents across both LGAs, marked by growing mutual respect and cultural integration. As one respondent shared: *"We are mainly Tiv people; we have other ethnic groups and we live peacefully – they honour our culture and we honour theirs."* This sentiment reflects the deeper sense of mutual respect that has developed between the two groups since the peace agreement.

Historically, tensions between Tiv farmers and other ethnic groups over land use and business practices had strained relations. However, following the peace agreement, community meetings facilitated by local leaders have enabled both groups to reach agreements on trade and land leasing, significantly reducing longstanding frictions. This development was further demonstrated with the launch of a cooperative farming initiative in late 2023, where Tiv and non-Tiv farmers collaborated on a communal cassava farm. Participants reported that this project not only improved food security but also strengthened the social bonds between them.

### Challenges in Agreement Implementation

Despite notable progress, the implementation of the Konshisha-Oju peace agreement continues to face several challenges that require sustained attention. One of the main difficulties has been the **slow advancement of the boundary demarcation process**. While the Deputy Governor's attendance at the launch of the initiative signalled strong political support, demarking boundaries remained incomplete at the time of evaluation. Funding delays and logistical constraints have slowed the process, leading to uncertainty among some community members. Without clear boundaries, tensions over land use persist in certain areas, particularly during planting and grazing seasons. HD continues to accompany the demarcation process to ensure its successful completion.

Additionally, some community members remain sceptical about the long-term sustainability of the agreement. While many farmers and herders have embraced dialogue and cooperation, **a minority of stakeholders are still hesitant**, fearing that compromise may weaken their claims to land and resources. This resistance is particularly evident among young people previously mobilised during the conflict, who have yet to fully transition into peaceful economic activities.

Climate-related pressures – including erratic rainfall and prolonged drought – continue to stress land and water resources, underscoring the urgency of sustainable resource management and climate adaptation measures. Despite some initial progress, **financial, technical and logistical support from the government, as well as climate and development actors, is essential to fully implement the agreement's natural resource management and climate adaptation provisions**, and prevent renewed resource-based conflicts.

In the second phase of the project, HD actively explored cross-sectoral partnerships and liaised with relevant government ministries to encourage institutional support for implementation. In doing so, HD adopted a phased approach centred on promoting local and state-level accountability. This included engaging with government institutions to encourage climate adaptation initiatives, such as reforestation, dredging and capacity building for climate-resilient agriculture. In the Konshisha and Oju LGAs, HD engaged with the Benue State Ministry of Water Resources, Environment and Climate Change to secure seedlings for community-led tree-planting efforts. The project team also reached out to private foundations – such as the TY Danjuma Foundation to explore opportunities for sinking boreholes – as well as to international development actors and climate-focused organisations. For instance, the team discussed food security and livelihood programmes aligned with the agreement's goals with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Overall, the evaluation found that the Konshisha-Oju dialogue process represents a landmark achievement in fostering inclusive decision-making, reducing violence, promoting sustainable natural resource management and improving livelihoods. While challenges remain, the agreement has laid a strong foundation for peaceful resource-sharing and long-term community resilience.

### Awe-Azara Process

In Nasarawa State, HD facilitated the **Awe-Azara peace process** as part of its efforts to support the implementation of the Nigerian federal government's **NLTP**, which seeks to mitigate and prevent farmer-herder conflict by modernising the livestock sector and establishing pilot ranches. The federal government earmarked the Awe grazing reserve as a target area for one such pilot ranch. The area is home to diverse ethnic farming and herding communities, who have historically experienced sporadic conflict over access to and management of natural resources.

Following extensive conflict analysis, HD launched a formal dialogue process that culminated in **two key agreements** in December 2022: one agreement was signed by the various communities in **Awe LGA**, and the second by the **Emirs of Awe and Azara**. Both agreements aimed to support the establishment of the pilot ranch in Awe LGA, and ensure peaceful coexistence and social cohesion among farmers and herders.

The community agreement brought together local leaders, stakeholders and residents to resolve ongoing disputes over natural resources, and establish guidelines for cooperation and conflict prevention at the grassroots level. It focuses on issues around climate change, and access to and the management of natural resources. It is the **first HD-facilitated agreement in Nigeria that includes community commitments to integrate climate mitigation and adaptation** into their agricultural practices, and rehabilitate degraded crop and grazing areas. In parallel, the agreement between the Emirs of Awe and Azara focuses on reinforcing traditional authorities, and ensuring that customary laws and leadership structures support broader peace initiatives. The Emirs' agreement also addresses issues such as territorial occupancy, boundary clarity, the ownership and occupancy of the grazing reserve, possible litigation, and natural resource conservation. Together, these dual agreements provide a comprehensive framework for peace, addressing both local grievances and institutional governance.

### Violence Reduction and Conflict Resolution

A key achievement of the Awe-Azara process has been the **substantial reduction in violence** between community groups, particularly among farmers and herders, with **82% of KII and FGD participants reporting fewer violent incidents** since the signing of the peace agreements. Community members have consistently stressed the role of early intervention, proactive dialogue and traditional authorities in de-escalating tensions and preventing conflict. As one herder stated: *"After the peace agreement was signed, the fighting over land ceased and we now enjoy a period of peace, where disputes are settled through dialogue rather than violence."* The signing of the peace agreements has contributed to a greater sense of security, allowing people to return and resume their livelihoods. One resident stated: *"The peace agreements have created a stable environment. IDPs have returned to their communities because conditions are now peaceful and resource access is restored."*

Prior to the dialogue process, land and resource disputes were common triggers of violence in both communities. In particular, the area had witnessed frequent clashes over the use of water resources, farmland and access to grazing areas. Since the peace agreements were signed, several potentially violent incidents have been successfully mediated. In one notable case, a land allocation dispute between two villages, which had escalated to threats of violence, was resolved through dialogue and negotiation, facilitated by community leaders. This helped mitigate further tensions and brought stability to the area.

Community members emphasised the importance of early warning systems in identifying and addressing emerging tensions. One representative from the Women Steering Committee noted: *"There is constant promotion of unity and people now report any emerging issues immediately through our established structures."* These structures include HD's Conflict Early Warning Early Response system, which – together with the mediation training provided by HD – ensures that disputes can be addressed promptly, thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation. Overall, the community peace agreement's framework emphasises early detection and resolution, with youth representatives playing an important role in this approach.

In addition, several community members described how traditional authorities now play a central role in preventing tensions from escalating. One community member noted the effectiveness of leadership interventions: *"The meetings called by our Emir have been effective. When there were signs of tension, we would come together to discuss and resolve the issues – there is no more fighting over water or land as before."* In the same vein, a member of the Youth Steering Committee emphasised: *"The Emir brought everyone together and now, whenever there is even a hint of a dispute, the matter is immediately taken to a meeting. We have seen conflicts resolve before they even start."*

### Progress in Natural Resource Management and Climate Adaptation

The evaluation found that the peace agreements have significantly improved cooperation among local communities in managing key natural resources such as land, water and forests. This shift towards more cooperative resource management represents a starting point for long-term environmental rehabilitation and resilience.

While interactions between community members were previously marred by violent altercations over resource access, the peace agreements have prompted a shift towards more collaborative and sustainable practices. Notably, communities have formed new committees to oversee water use, grazing areas and tree felling, helping to prevent overexploitation and promote responsible use. As one respondent explained: *"We now have specific times to fetch water. Before, we fought over access, but now, with the committee in place, we share the river fairly."* In one village, community members implemented a **rotational system for accessing grazing areas and water sources** to ensure equitable access. This arrangement has been particularly important during periods of drought, when resources are scarce.

Several KII and FGD participants emphasised that the establishment of resource-sharing structures and mechanisms, including committees for resource management and environmental stewardship, form the **backbone of local climate adaptation efforts**. As one youth leader emphasised: *"Our resource-sharing agreement has laid the groundwork for joint climate action."* Initial progress in relation to implementing the peace agreement provisions on climate adaptation include the **promotion of climate-smart agricultural practices**, such as soil conservation, crop rotation and the protection of pasture from overgrazing. Following the peace agreements, communities have started establishing **locally led initiatives to rehabilitate degraded land and improve water conservation**, including the development of small-scale irrigation systems to enhance agricultural productivity during dry seasons. Communities have also begun enforcing the agreement's **provisions regulating the use of firewood** and other forest resources, preventing overexploitation and promoting environmental conservation. Various interviewees highlighted that these efforts typically involve traditional rulers and local government. For instance, in one case, these actors *"advised on adequate afforestation and evacuation of community members living close to rivers to avoid flooding."*

Although these steps are helping to address immediate climate pressures and build resilience to environmental impacts, community members acknowledge that more needs to be done to fully adapt to evolving climate-related environmental challenges.

### Improved Livelihoods and Reopening of Markets

Interviewees reported that the reduction in violence and the establishment of resource management practices have had a positive impact on livelihoods. With conflict subsiding, movement restrictions have been lifted and local markets, which had intermittently been closed due to insecurity, have reopened. This has facilitated greater economic activity, as farmers, traders and livestock owners are now able to safely travel to markets and exchange goods. As one community member remarked: *"Our roads, which were once blocked during periods of conflict, are now open. This has allowed people to access markets and public services more easily."* Another interviewee echoed this observation: *"The community is more prosperous now; people farm and enjoy their labour."* This economic revitalisation is crucial for long-term peace and stability, as communities depend heavily on agriculture and trade.

### Improved Social Cohesion

Overall, the Awe-Azara peace process has led to significant improvements in social cohesion, particularly between farmers and herders. Previously adversarial, their relationship has transformed into one of collaboration and mutual support, evident in their shared use of resources, and joint participation in cultural and social community events. As one interviewee highlighted: *"Farmers support the herders ... while herders provide waste from cattle for farmers as manure."* Similarly, another respondent observed: *"The peace agreement has fostered greater unity; our community now engages in joint activities and cultural events, which were rare in the past."* These joint activities have strengthened interpersonal relationships and helped develop a more cohesive community identity, further solidifying the positive impacts of the peace agreement. The reopening of markets has also contributed to community cohesion, as people from different villages are once again interacting regularly.

A key indicator of this transformation in intercommunity relationships is the ability of community members to live together peacefully, without a resurgence in tribal conflicts. One interviewee stated: *"People now live together in one place without the old tribal conflicts, which is a sign of improved relationships."* Moreover, the peace agreement has contributed to greater social integration. As one respondent noted: *"We are living together, eating together and intermarried."* The ability to marry across ethnic lines signifies

a breakdown in traditional barriers and a shift towards mutual respect, illustrating the deepening bonds between previously divided groups.

In summary, the evaluation found that the Awe-Azara process has reduced conflicts, strengthened social cohesion, established collaborative resource management practices and enhanced conflict resolution mechanisms. In addition, it has also laid a strong foundation for climate adaptation through sustainable land use and environmental stewardship.

### Benue Statewide Process

Building on the successful facilitation of local-level natural resource peace agreements in the Konshisha and Oju LGAs in Benue State, HD began the groundwork for a statewide peace process for Benue State in early 2024. The goal of the statewide peace process is to develop a framework to address endemic farmer-herder conflict across the state. Benue State has borne the brunt of tensions between farmers and herders in Nigeria over the past two decades, with over 2,000 people killed in 2023 alone and more than 1.5 million people displaced. This highlights the importance of securing a statewide agreement on addressing conflict and achieving peace. For such an agreement to advance sustainable natural resource management and peaceful coexistence, HD advocates for the inclusion of provisions related to climate adaptation.

A key milestone was reached in May 2024 when HD facilitated the **signing of a roadmap by 10 ethnic communities across Benue State**, which outlined the proposed format and content of the formal dialogue process. The signing of the roadmap followed months of comprehensive and inclusive conflict analysis that resulted in the renewal of HD's mandate for engagement in Benue State, and required engaging with local and state governments, traditional rulers, religious leaders, the diaspora community, farmer and herder associations, the business community, as well as women and young people. HD's renewed mandate for engagement reflects the trust of local stakeholders and their recognition of HD's peacemaking efforts in the state since 2019.

The roadmap established a structured and participatory dialogue process, organised around Benue State's three senatorial zones, with diverse community representation. It stipulates a multi-layered approach – including traditional rulers, ethnic leaders, women and youth representatives – to ensure broad, inclusive participation. The roadmap also includes a detailed conflict matrix, systematically identifying specific areas of contention between communities and the underlying causes of these conflicts, such as disputes over land and resource allocation, and offers targeted recommendations for their resolution, complete with timeframes.

Following the adoption of the roadmap, HD kicked off the formal dialogue process with **three dialogue sessions** in the second half of 2024. The process employs a bottom-up approach, and started by consulting traditional rulers and ethnic development associations. Based on these consultations, a reference group of ethnic community leaders was formed to define community positions and assist in appointing a steering committee. This committee, comprising representatives of different interest groups (including women and young people), in turn selected a core team responsible for peace monitoring and further capacity building.

The formal dialogue sessions focused on natural resource issues, cattle rustling, criminality and banditry, and the influx of herders from neighbouring states. The sessions resulted in **two outcome documents** outlining steps for addressing these issues, promoting shared access to and joint management of natural resources, and including a commitment to promote the implementation of the stipulated recommendations. The sessions were preceded by capacity, trust and confidence-building measures for the communities, preparing them for the formal dialogue discussions and creating awareness of the distinct nature of the conflicts, particularly their direct link to climate change and its impacts. As part of the

Benue statewide dialogue process, HD also convened two distinct parallel sessions of the Women and Youth Steering Committees, collecting the views of the two groups as well as their ideas for addressing the various conflict drivers.

Overall, the evaluation found that, while still in its early stages, the Benue statewide process is laying the foundation for sustainable peace by fostering trust, inclusivity and structured dialogue. The roadmap and the first outcome documents provide a clear path forward, positioning the process as a replicable model for conflict resolution in similarly affected regions.

### Cross-Border Process

In 2024, HD started preparing the ground for a cross-border process involving traditional rulers from Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states to facilitate a cross-border framework for cooperation between farmers and herders, including climate-sensitive provisions. The cross-border peace process is a structured effort to mitigate conflicts and foster cooperation between communities divided by territorial boundaries. It aims to address long-standing disputes over land, water and other natural resources.

Following the **endorsement of HD's cross-border natural resource peace process by traditional rulers in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states**, HD conducted a series of consultation sessions in border locations between the three states. The consultations sought to identify specific conflict issues affecting the relationships between communities in the border locations, understand their positions, and determine whether there are existing traditional mechanisms that have been applied in managing previous cross-border tensions and conflicts. Moreover, the consultation sessions helped validate the structure and format for the formal discussions, defined the negotiating teams, and informed issue prioritisation and selection. HD also made progress towards securing a mandate from the Taraba State government, engaging with key stakeholders bilaterally and through the chair of the Northern Governors Forum. At the time of the evaluation, formal discussions on the cross-border process were yet to commence.

## Outcome 2: Functional Community and State Peace Infrastructures

Establishing and maintaining functional peace infrastructures, such as local peace committees, is key to the implementation and sustainability of the peace agreements. These structures play a crucial role in resolving disputes, managing tensions and fostering long-term social cohesion.

In the Konshisha-Oju process, the Peace Committee was established following the signing of the agreement to monitor and support its implementation. This committee has become central to maintaining peace and ensuring that emerging issues are swiftly addressed. Meanwhile, the Awe-Azara process did not lead to the establishment of a peace committee but instead focused on strengthening the role of traditional authorities in implementing the agreement. In particular, the Emirs' agreement has enhanced governance structures related to facilitating resource-sharing agreements, and promoting collaborative land and water use between farming and herding communities.

### Konshisha-Oju Process

The Konshisha-Oju peace process has led to the establishment of the dedicated **Peace Committee**, tasked with overseeing and ensuring the successful implementation and monitoring of the natural resource peace agreement. The evaluation found that by supporting the establishment of a community-based peace committee, and promoting links with government at the local, state and federal level, HD is creating an enabling environment for communities to address natural resource conflicts, while also promoting resilience to increasing competition for scarce resources.

### Establishment and Membership of the Peace Committee

The Konshisha-Oju Peace Committee was formed in October 2023 through two meetings between the Tiv and Iggede communities, facilitated by HD. During these meetings, HD helped the committee in drafting an implementation and monitoring framework to guide their work. The committee comprises representatives from the Iggede and Tiv steering committees who participated in the formal dialogue sessions, along with representatives of traditional authorities, women and young people from the communities, local government officials, local security agencies, and religious leaders.

The Deputy Governor of Benue State, who also serves as the chair of the Benue State Boundary Commission, officially inaugurated the committee, signalling the government's willingness to support community-led efforts in securing and sustaining peace. During the inauguration ceremony, the state government also reaffirmed its commitment to support the implementation of recommendations on boundary demarcation included in the agreement.

**HD has been supporting the committee by providing capacity-building mediation and negotiation training.** For instance, in March 2024, HD partnered with Mercy Corps Nigeria to organise a capacity-building workshop on negotiation and mediation skills for the Konshisha-Oju Peace Committee. The training aimed to strengthen the committee's efforts in upholding their resource-sharing peace agreement by equipping them to prevent and manage potential tensions and spillover conflicts that could compromise the successful implementation of the agreement. HD also assists the committee in facilitating quarterly meetings to discuss progress in relation to the committee's key objectives and ad hoc meetings to address emerging issues as needed.

### Role and Achievements of the Peace Committee

The Konshisha-Oju Peace Committee has been instrumental in:

- Mediating disputes related to land, grazing routes and resource-sharing;
- Ensuring ongoing dialogue between the two communities to prevent tensions from escalating;
- Monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement and addressing emerging challenges.

One of its major successes has been **preventing violent clashes over the inheritance of farmland**, which had previously been a major trigger of conflict. One local chief described the change: *"Before, disputes over inherited land often turned violent. Now, the committee steps in early, mediates between families and finds a fair resolution before conflicts escalate."*

The committee has also facilitated discussions on access to key resources, such as water and grazing areas. As one community member explained: *"When disputes arise over water points, we now take them to the Peace Committee instead of fighting over them. This has helped us avoid many conflicts."* In addition, the Peace Committee is involved in the boundary demarcation process, participating in meetings with the Benue State Boundary Commission and the Deputy Governor. The committee's efforts in the demarcation process provide a model that the state government aims to replicate in other areas affected by the same issues.

### Challenges and Areas for Improvement

While instrumental in implementing the agreement, the evaluation identified several key challenges that the Konshisha-Oju Peace Committee faces. These include:

- **Resource limitations:** The committee operates on a voluntary basis, and lacks funding for logistics, monitoring and outreach activities.

- **Need for greater inclusivity:** While women and young people are represented, their involvement in decision-making remains limited.
- **Sustainability concerns:** The effectiveness of the committee depends heavily on the commitment of key individuals. If they disengage, the peace infrastructure could weaken.

Moreover, while the peace agreement has improved trust between communities, some local leaders expressed concerns about inconsistent support from security agencies in upholding resolutions made by the committee. One member of the committee noted: *"We work hard to mediate, but sometimes, when agreements are broken, we have no real authority to enforce them. That is a challenge."*

### Awe-Azara Process

In the Awe-Azara process, significant progress has been made in developing the necessary peace infrastructures to support the implementation of the peace agreements. These structures – involving traditional rulers, local government officials, state authorities and security agencies – have been crucial in managing disputes, ensuring that peace is upheld and preventing the recurrence of conflicts.

### Strengthening Traditional Authorities and Customary Laws

An important aspect of the peace infrastructures in the Awe-Azara process are **traditional authorities** who play a key role in maintaining peace. The agreement between the Emirs of Awe and Azara emphasised the importance of reinforcing traditional authorities, and ensuring that customary laws and governance mechanisms are aligned with the broader goals of peace. The Emirs, as influential figures, have become key advocates for peace, supporting the integration of conflict resolution mechanisms into their leadership practices. One prominent local leader remarked: *"The Emirs' involvement in this process has helped calm tensions. People trust the traditional leadership and their support for the peace process makes a big difference in ensuring people follow the rules."*

This endorsement of traditional governance and its integration into the formal peace framework has been vital for sustaining peace at the community level. While not all issues related to territorial boundaries have been fully resolved, the Emirs' commitment to supporting the peace efforts has created a foundation for the gradual resolution of these tensions. Their role in facilitating discussions, especially on sensitive matters such as grazing rights and territorial disputes, has been instrumental in maintaining stability in the region.

### Local Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Although a formal peace committee was not established in the Awe-Azara process, local informal conflict resolution mechanisms have been strengthened through the involvement of community members in dialogue and HD's capacity-building efforts. Local mechanisms play an important role in managing emerging disputes. Following the signing of the peace agreements, communities have increasingly relied on community-based dialogue and mediation processes led by elders and local leaders. These informal mechanisms provide a platform for individuals to voice their concerns and resolve tensions in a non-violent manner. As one elder shared: *"When there is a conflict now, we don't immediately go to war. We sit together, talk it through and find a solution. The agreements have helped us to understand the importance of resolving issues peacefully."*

This shift towards community-based conflict resolution has not only helped prevent violent escalations but has also strengthened the social fabric within the communities. It has laid the groundwork for a culture of dialogue, with issues addressed before they escalate into major conflicts. These grassroots conflict resolution practices are essential for ensuring long-term peace and stability in the region.

### Role of Security Forces in Peace Implementation

Security forces have played an important role in supporting the peace process in Awe-Azara by helping to maintain stability and enforcing the agreements. Local police and other security agencies have collaborated with community leaders to ensure that disputes are handled peacefully and do not escalate into violence. Security personnel have also worked closely with the traditional authorities to monitor compliance with the agreements and respond rapidly to emerging tensions.

One local leader explained: *"Unlike before, when security forces would only intervene after violence had erupted, they are now actively engaged in preventing conflict. They attend meetings, listen to community concerns and act as a neutral party to ensure that agreements are upheld."*

One major improvement has been the shift in the perception of security agencies, which were previously viewed with distrust by some community members. Several interviewees mentioned that by engaging in dialogue and supporting mediation efforts, security forces have contributed to rebuilding confidence and fostering a sense of safety among both farming and herding groups. Their presence in key resource areas, such as grazing areas and water points, has deterred unauthorised access and reinforced the principles of fair resource-sharing outlined in the peace agreements.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain in ensuring that security forces continue to play a constructive role. Limited resources and logistical constraints mean that their presence is not always consistent, particularly in remote areas. Additionally, some community members still expressed concerns about the trustworthiness of certain security actors. Addressing these challenges requires continued collaboration between the government, traditional authorities and civil society to strengthen trust and ensure security forces remain supportive of the peace process.

### Government and Institutional Support

The involvement of state-level institutions and government agencies is a critical element in the implementation of the agreements. In particular, the Nasarawa State government has supported the peace process with its efforts to advance a pilot ranch in Awe. To support the state government in this endeavour, HD has been providing training on mediation and dialogue skills to the Nasarawa Livestock Transformation Office. HD has also organised learning opportunities and study tours to regenerative farms for the State Livestock Transformation Officers, and advocates for the integration and adoption of the NLTP approach piloted in Awe by the newly established Ministry of Livestock Development.

However, challenges remain in securing sustained and coordinated support for other aspects of the peace process, especially in terms of infrastructure and long-term monitoring. One government official remarked: *"The peace process has opened our eyes to the importance of ensuring that the agreements don't just exist on paper. We need to create the right environment for the communities to implement these plans successfully."*

While support from state authorities has been instrumental in facilitating the peace process, further strengthening the capacity of government agencies to provide continued support to community-level peace infrastructures is essential. Local authorities and the broader state government will need to ensure that resources are allocated for long-term peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in terms of sustaining peace agreements and fostering continued cooperation between herding and farming communities. As one community leader stated: *"We've made good progress, but we need more help from the government to make sure these structures are here to stay. It's not enough just to sign agreements. We need the right institutions to support us."*

## Conclusion

The outcome evaluation of the first two phases of the project (2022–24) found that the two natural resource peace agreements – signed in the Awe Local Government Area (2022), and Konshisha and Oju Local Government Areas (2023) – have reduced violence, established collaborative resource management and climate adaptation measures, and improved livelihoods for communities. This has benefited more than half a million people across Nigeria's Middle Belt. Building on the successful facilitation of these local-level natural resource peace agreements, HD scaled up its approach to encompass statewide and cross-border processes to help create a coherent regional framework for addressing farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt. By strengthening locally led dispute resolution mechanisms and sustainable, collaborative management of shared resources, the agreements provide a foundation for community resilience to both climate change and the risk of future conflict. Moreover, the inclusive dialogue processes underpinning the peace agreements offer a successful, scalable and replicable model for addressing resource-based conflict

