

WEATHERING RISK

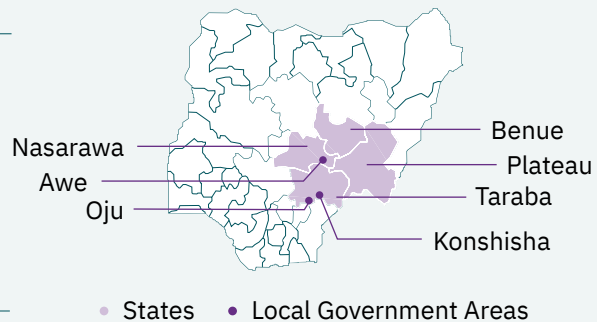
PEACE PILLAR

Evaluation Synthesis: Nigeria Project

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



Project locations:



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The signing of **climate-sensitive 'natural resource peace agreements'** in Nigeria's Middle Belt has led to significant reductions in violence, strengthened inter-ethnic cooperation in resource management and the return of displaced persons.
- The deliberate integration of **climate adaptation provisions** into these agreements has prompted locally led initiatives in climate-smart agriculture, land rehabilitation, afforestation and water conservation. Over time, these efforts will **improve soil fertility, reduce erosion and increase water availability**, contributing to more secure livelihoods.
- 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.
- The inclusive dialogue processes underpinning the peace agreements offer a **successful, scalable and replicable model** for addressing resource-based conflicts.



The three '**natural resource peace agreements**' are benefiting over **half a million people** in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.



Around **80% of respondents** in key informant interviews and focus group discussions reported a **decline in violence**.



Reduced violence has enabled the re-opening of one local market and the lifting of access restrictions to another, **improving access to food and income opportunities**.

Project Overview

Farmer-herder conflicts over natural resources have claimed thousands of lives across Nigeria in recent years. The impacts of climate change, such as prolonged droughts and irregular rainfall, are intensifying these conflicts by reducing the availability of essential resources and driving displacement. These challenges are particularly severe in the country's Middle Belt, where communities are vulnerable to both environmental and conflict-related pressures.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's (HD) project *Multi-Level Approaches to Sustainable Peace in Nigeria's Middle Belt* works to prevent and resolve violent conflicts over natural resources exacerbated by climate change. Focusing on Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states, HD fosters resilience and contributes to sustainable peace by facilitating inclusive dialogue processes that bring 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 capacity among stakeholders to prevent resource-based conflicts. This approach has resulted in the development, signing and implementation of community-level natural resource-sharing agreements that incorporate provisions on climate adaptation measures.

Key Outcomes and Insights

An outcome evaluation of the project's first two phases (2022–24) found that the natural resource peace agreements signed in the Awe Local Government Area (2022) and the 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 over half a million people in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.

REDUCED VIOLENCE AND ENHANCED COOPERATION

The three natural resource peace agreements have led to a significant reduction in violent clashes and a marked improvement in inter-communal relations, particularly between farmers and herders. Around 80% of respondents in key informant interviews and focus group discussions reported a decline in violence. Community members also noted greater inter-ethnic understanding and increased engagement in collaborative activities. For example, in the Konshisha and Oju Local Government Areas, farmers from two ethnic groups established a communal cassava farm. Overall, the agreements have fostered a culture of dialogue, encouraging communities to resolve disputes peacefully rather than through confrontation. This reduction in violence has enhanced security and prompted many displaced people to return. The sustainability of these outcomes is reinforced through local peace committees and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which continue to mediate disputes and monitor the implementation of agreements.

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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.

– Community member from
Awe Local Government Area,
Nasarawa State

IMPROVED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The peace agreements have enabled collaborative governance of vital natural resources such as water, grazing lands and forests. Community members have formed locally led committees to regulate access to and usage of resources, including through rotational systems for accessing grazing areas and water sources. This cooperative approach has reduced disputes, and promoted more sustainable and equitable resource management, strengthening the long-term sustainability of the agreements.

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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.

– Resident from Konshisha and Oju Local Government Areas, Benue State

CLIMATE ADAPTATION PROGRESS

Incorporating provisions on climate adaptation measures into the peace agreements has led communities to start adopting climate-smart agricultural practices, such as soil conservation, crop rotation and sustainable pasture management. Locally led, context-informed initiatives on land rehabilitation, afforestation and water conservation are also under way, helping to build greater community resilience to climatic shocks and reduce the risk of future resource-based conflicts. Yet, communities recognise that more needs to be done to fully adapt to evolving climate challenges. The continued adoption of measures promoting climate adaptation in line with the agreement provisions requires additional technical expertise, local capacity-building and financial resources.

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Our resource-sharing agreement has laid the groundwork for joint climate action.

– Youth leader from Awe Local Government Area, Nasarawa State

REVITALISED LIVELIHOODS

Community members reported that reduced conflict and the establishment of cooperative resource management have had a positive impact on livelihoods. With conflicts subsiding, community-imposed restrictions preventing certain ethnic groups from accessing one local market have been lifted, while another market, previously shut down due to violence and insecurity, has reopened. This has revitalised economic activity, enabling farmers, traders and livestock owners to resume the exchange of food and other goods.

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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.

– Community leader from Konshisha and Oju Local Government Areas, Benue State



Ukpute Market, Oju Local Government Area © Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Lessons and Recommendations

HD's inclusive, climate-sensitive dialogue approach represents a **scalable and adaptable model** for addressing resource-based conflicts across Nigeria and other fragile settings. The outcome evaluation highlighted key lessons to guide progress in the next phase of the project, including recommendations for programming and donor support. These insights are relevant not only to the Nigerian context but also to mediation and dialogue approaches for addressing natural resource conflicts in other regions facing similar challenges.

LESSON 1:

PROMOTING CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS IS KEY TO IMPLEMENTING PEACE AGREEMENT PROVISIONS ON SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION.

The effective implementation of peace agreement provisions on natural resource management and climate adaptation depends on strong partnerships between government, climate and environment experts, development actors, donors, and local communities. By pooling financial, technical and logistical support, these partnerships help ensure that climate adaptation and sustainable resource management measures are implemented successfully, reducing the risk of future resource-based conflicts.

Recommendations for programming and donor support

Peacemaking actors should prioritise facilitating cross-sectoral partnerships with government institutions, development actors and climate experts. Engaging these stakeholders from the outset will enhance the integration and sustainability of climate-smart resource management, livelihood support and economic development within dialogue processes and their outcomes.

Donors can play a crucial role in fostering cross-sectoral partnerships and supporting integrated approaches across funding streams, ensuring coordination and mutually reinforcing efforts.

LESSON 2:

SCALING UP LOCAL APPROACHES CAN HELP CREATE COHERENT REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ADDRESSING FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS.

Climate-sensitive peace processes at the local level have effectively addressed protracted conflicts over natural resources. Expanding these approaches can enable stakeholders to develop broader, region-wide frameworks for managing resource-based conflicts, fostering more coordinated and comprehensive conflict resolution efforts. For example, building on local successes, HD has scaled up its approach in Nigeria by facilitating a dialogue process among 10 communities in Benue State seeking to reach a statewide agreement. Additionally, HD has launched a cross-border process aimed at establishing a framework for farmer-herder cooperation between traditional rulers from Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states.

Recommendations for programming and donor support

Peacemaking organisations and donors should prioritise inclusive approaches that integrate and link mediation efforts across different levels of government and society. Donors can also provide political support to such dialogues by engaging with higher levels of government and lobbying key decision-makers. Investing in scalable, multi-level peace processes that promote collaborative resource management and climate adaptation can have a catalytic effect, generating both sustainable peace and positive environmental outcomes.

LESSON 3:

DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS WHILE MAINTAINING INCLUSIVE, GENDER-RESPONSIVE DIALOGUE PROVIDES A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LASTING PEACE.

In Nigeria, traditional leaders have been instrumental in encouraging community acceptance and implementation of natural resource peace agreements. Their legitimacy, rooted in cultural and social authority, enables them to enforce agreement provisions and de-escalate tensions within their communities. Balancing support for traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with promoting inclusive, gender-responsive dialogue can foster social cohesion, ensure equitable participation in local governance and decision-making, and sustain lasting peace.

Recommendations for programming and donor support

Peacemaking actors and donors should engage with and support capacity-building for traditional leaders who hold legitimacy within their communities, equipping them with skills in mediation, conflict- and climate-sensitive governance, and inclusive decision-making. At the same time, maintaining a gender-responsive and



Awe-Azara Emirate Natural Resource Peace Agreement Signing © Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

inclusive dialogue approach, creating space for otherwise marginalised voices, is crucial to ensure that outcomes reflect the needs and perspectives of all social groups within communities.

LESSON 4:

PROVIDING CONTINUED SUPPORT TO AND INVESTING IN LOCAL PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES IS CENTRAL TO ENSURING THEIR LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS.

Peace infrastructures, such as local peace committees composed of diverse community stakeholders and dialogue participants, are fundamental to the successful implementation and sustainability of peace agreements. Tasked with monitoring and supporting agreement implementation, these structures play a vital role in resolving disputes, managing tensions and fostering long-term social cohesion. Yet, many peace infrastructures, including those in Konshisha-Oju and Awe-Azara, face significant resource limitations and capacity constraints.

Recommendations for programming and donor support

To ensure the long-term effectiveness of local peace infrastructures, peacemaking organisations should provide ongoing technical assistance and capacity-building. Commitments from national and local government agencies to collaborate with these structures, and align their budgetary and planning processes, are equally essential for ensuring their sustainability. In Nigeria, institutions such as the Benue State Peace and Reconciliation Commission and the Plateau Peacebuilding Agency can play a key role in strengthening local peace committees and connecting them to broader climate-sensitive peace efforts.

Donors should find ways to support local-level peace infrastructures until they are integrated into the existing governance system. Donors can also encourage national government recognition and support for these institutions.

LESSON 5:

ENHANCING GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY ACTOR ENGAGEMENT IN IMPLEMENTING PEACE AGREEMENTS CAN STRENGTHEN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES.

Government actors and security forces accepted by local stakeholders can play an important role in supporting the implementation of peace agreements and stabilising communities. For instance, in Benue State, security actors have responded rapidly to emerging tensions, while the state government is supporting a boundary demarcation process that is key to implementing the provisions of the Konshisha-Oju peace agreement. However, sustained and meaningful engagement with government and security actors often remains a challenge. Limited resources and logistical constraints mean that their presence is not always consistent, and they are not always accepted by communities, particularly in remote areas.

Recommendations for programming and donor support

Peacemaking organisations can enhance the role of government and security actors in conflict prevention and resolution by providing tailored training on conflict- and climate-sensitive approaches, actively promoting trust-building, and facilitating dialogue between security personnel, government representatives and local communities. Mediators can also continue to advocate for consistent government support for the implementation of agreement provisions.

International donors can reinforce such efforts by engaging national government and security stakeholders within the framework of broader development and rule of law cooperation.

Outlook

Building on its successes and lessons so far, HD's climate-sensitive mediation project in Nigeria will continue supporting the implementation of local-level natural resource peace agreements, linking them to development and conservation opportunities. Ongoing capacity-building for state and community peace structures will further strengthen local ownership, and equip communities with the practical skills to monitor progress and manage future challenges. In parallel, HD is scaling up local approaches into statewide and cross-border dialogue processes to help create a coherent regional framework for addressing farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

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