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The Effect of Ethnic Conflict on Community Development: A Case Study of Takum LGA, Taraba State

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of ethnic conflict on community development in Takum LGA, Taraba State, Nigeria. Ethnic conflict, driven by identity-based divisions and resource competition, has increasingly undermined sustainable development by disrupting social cohesion, economic activities, and infrastructure. The study identified the causes of ethnic conflict, assessed its impact on community development, and explored strategies for mitigation. Anchored on social identity theory, the research explained how group affiliations and intergroup rivalry intensify conflict and hinder collective development efforts. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with community leaders, government officials, and affected residents. Quantitative data were analysed using percentages, while qualitative data were thematically interpreted. Findings revealed that land disputes (47.4%), political marginalization (39.6%), and cultural differences (36.3%) are major drivers of conflict. The study further showed that ethnic conflict leads to heightened insecurity (60.4%), disruption of development projects (53.2%), and moderate effects on education and poverty. Dialogue and mediation (62.3%) emerged as the most preferred conflict resolution strategy. The study concluded that ethnic conflict significantly constrains community development in Takum LGA. It recommends participatory land reforms, inclusive governance, strengthened community-based security, and institutionalized dialogue mechanisms involving government, traditional leaders, and civil society to promote sustainable peace and development.

Keywords: Ethnic conflict; Community development; Social identity theory; Insecurity; Land disputes; Political marginalization; Conflict resolution

Introduction

When communities erupt into ethnic violence, development doesn't simply stall; it reverses, leaving generations trapped in cycles of poverty, displacement, and despair. Ethnic conflict represents one of the most destructive forces undermining community development globally, attacking the very foundations upon which sustainable progress is built. From the fragmented societies of post-conflict Bosnia to the strife-torn regions of Ethiopia's Afar State, and increasingly across Nigeria's diverse landscape, the evidence is stark: where ethnic tensions flourish, human advancement withers (Mollaw, 2023). The relationship

between ethnic conflict and community development is not merely correlative but deeply causal; violent inter-group clashes destroy infrastructure, displace populations, undermine economic activity, and erode the social cohesion essential for collective progress.

Across the globe, ethnic conflict manifests devastating consequences on community development trajectories. In Nigeria, where over 250 ethnic groups coexist, ethnic violence has become endemic to the development challenge (Obikwelu, 2025). The nation recorded no fewer than 2,811 incidences of ethnic conflict between 1999 and 2021, resulting in 18,132 fatalities and immense displacement (Adenuga et al., 2023). These conflicts transcend mere statistics; they represent shattered livelihoods, destroyed educational infrastructure, collapsed healthcare systems, and fractured social capital. The disruption extends beyond physical destruction to psychological trauma, eroding the trust and cooperation necessary for collective action toward development initiatives.

Taraba State exemplifies this tragic pattern at Nigeria's intersection of ethnic, religious, and resource-based tensions. The state is home to over 80 ethnic groups, including Jukun, Tiv, Mambilla, Fulani, Kuteb, and Chamba, whose competition for land, political representation, and resources has generated cyclical violence (Sampson, 2026). Recurrent ethnic conflicts in the Southern Taraba Senatorial District have significantly disrupted trade and marketing activities across Wukari, Donga, Ibi, Takum, and Ussa Local Government Areas, affecting a population of over 1.5 million (Daniel et al., 2025). The conflicts have devastated agricultural productivity, destroyed market infrastructure, displaced traders, and inflated commodity prices, directly undermining economic recovery and livelihoods.

Within this broader context, Takum LGA emerges as a critical case study warranting urgent scholarly attention. Takum experiences the convergence of multiple conflict drivers: land disputes between farming and pastoralist communities, ethnic rivalry exacerbated by political marginalization, and resource competition intensified by poverty and unemployment (Daniel et al., 2025). Youth unemployment particularly fuels ethnic violence in Takum, where young people, lacking legitimate economic opportunities, become vulnerable to mobilization for violent confrontation (Wajim, 2020). The study of Takum's ethnic conflict is not merely academic; it represents a microcosm of Nigeria's broader development crisis, where ethnic tensions systematically undermine human capital development, infrastructure investment, and institutional capacity-building essential for sustainable progress. Takum LGA's experience demonstrates that sustainable development cannot be achieved while ethnic tensions remain unresolved; conversely, genuine peace initiatives must be accompanied by inclusive economic policies, equitable resource distribution, and community empowerment mechanisms that address root causes of conflict (Daniel et al., 2025). This study examined the effect of ethnic conflict on community development: A case study of Takum LGA, Taraba State.

Problem Statement

Ethnic conflict represents a persistent and multifaceted challenge to social cohesion and development across Nigeria's deeply pluralistic society. As a multi-ethnic nation with over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria has witnessed recurring patterns of identity-based violence that undermine political stability, social integration, and equitable development (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). These conflicts have manifested in various forms, from communal clashes to organized violence, with particularly severe consequences in the Middle Belt and southern regions, where resources, political power, and territorial claims intersect with ethnic and religious identities (Obikwelu, 2025). In Takum Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, ethnic tensions have escalated into sustained violence characterized by

recurring clashes, mass displacement of populations, destruction of properties, and profound social fragmentation (Daniel et al., 2025). Historical animosities between groups, compounded by contemporary competition for grazing lands, agricultural resources, and political representation, have fostered a persistent environment of insecurity that undermines all aspects of community life.

The destabilizing effects of ethnic conflict in Takum LGA are reflected across critical dimensions of community development. Ethnic violence has severely disrupted socioeconomic activities through the destruction of market infrastructure, displacement of traders, and disruption of agricultural production, the lifeblood of the region's rural economy (Daniel et al., 2025). Additionally, conflict-related insecurity has compromised access to basic services, including healthcare delivery, educational provision, and infrastructural development, while eroding social cohesion and communal trust (Ja'afaru, 2025). Despite documented evidence of conflict's devastating impact on neighboring areas within Taraba State, a critical gap persists in localized, empirical research that directly examines and quantifies the linkages between ethnic conflict and measurable outcomes of community development, specifically within Takum LGA. This lacuna limits policymakers' ability to design context-sensitive interventions and prevents the development of evidence-based conflict management strategies tailored to the area's unique socioeconomic and political dynamics. This study is therefore justified as essential for generating empirical knowledge, informing conflict mitigation policies, and providing actionable insights into how ethnic conflict undermines community development.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

i. Examine the causes of ethnic conflicts in Takum LGA.
ii. Assess the impact of these conflicts on community development.
iii. Identify strategies to mitigate ethnic conflicts and promote sustainable development.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict refers to a form of social and political confrontation in which groups defined by shared identity markers such as language, culture, ancestry, or religion engage in sustained disputes, often over power, resources, or recognition. Scholars converge on the view that such conflicts are not merely primordial but are frequently shaped by structural inequalities and political manipulation. Horowitz (1985) conceptualized ethnic conflict as a struggle among culturally defined groups for political power and material advantage, emphasizing the role of group comparison and competition. Gurr (2000) defined it as collective action by ethnic groups aimed at addressing perceived grievances, particularly political and economic discrimination, thereby linking conflict to relative deprivation. Similarly, Fearon and Laitin (2003) interpret ethnic conflict as violence occurring along ethnic lines, often facilitated by weak state institutions and opportunities for insurgency rather than deep-rooted ethnic hatred alone. These perspectives collectively highlight that ethnic conflict is multidimensional, rooted in identity, but significantly driven by political economy and institutional dynamics.

Community Development

Community development is a participatory, transformative process in which community members collectively identify their needs, mobilize local resources, and implement strategies to improve their social, economic, and environmental conditions sustainably. It emphasizes empowerment, local ownership, and capacity building, often involving collaboration between community members, government, and external agencies. According to Phillips and Pittman (2009), community development is both a process and an outcome that enhances the ability of people to act collectively while improving community well-being. Similarly, Green and Haines (2015) defined community development as a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life. In another perspective, Bhattacharyya (2004) conceptualized community development as the promotion of solidarity and agency, where solidarity reflects shared identity and cohesion, while agency denotes the capacity of people to act purposefully to shape their future. These definitions converge on the view that community development is not merely about physical or economic improvement but also about strengthening social relations and empowering communities to sustain development initiatives.

Causes of Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic conflict in Nigeria is widely understood as a product of historically embedded structural inequalities, colonial legacies, and persistent struggles over political power and resource distribution. Scholars consistently trace the roots of ethnic divisions to British colonial administrative strategies, particularly indirect rule, which institutionalized ethnic identities and reinforced regional disparities in governance and development (Suberu, 2001; Osaghae, 1998). These colonial arrangements created asymmetrical access to political authority and economic opportunities, laying the groundwork for postcolonial grievances among ethnic groups. Contemporary studies further emphasize the salience of elite manipulation of identity, where political actors mobilize ethnic sentiments to secure electoral advantage or maintain control over state resources (Mustapha, 2006). Empirical evidence underscores the magnitude of the problem: Nigeria has experienced recurrent communal and ethnic violence, with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project reporting over 3,600 fatalities linked to communal conflicts between 2020 and 2023 alone (ACLED, 2024). Additionally, horizontal inequalities, particularly in education, employment, and infrastructure, continue to fuel perceptions of marginalization and exclusion, especially in regions such as the Middle Belt, thereby intensifying intergroup tensions (Stewart, 2008). Resource competition and environmental pressures also constitute critical drivers of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, particularly in agrarian and resource-dependent regions. The proliferation of farmer-herder conflicts, often framed along ethnic and religious lines, has been linked to land scarcity, desertification, and population growth, which exacerbate competition over arable land and water resources (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) indicates that over 70 percent of rural households depend on agriculture for livelihood, increasing the likelihood of conflict in the context of shrinking environmental resources. Furthermore, weak state institutions and limited conflict-resolution mechanisms contribute to the persistence and escalation of violence, as the state often fails to mediate disputes effectively or enforce justice (International Crisis Group, 2023). The interaction between poverty and ethnic identity further complicates the conflict landscape, as economically deprived populations are more susceptible to mobilization along ethnic lines.

Conflicts in Community Development

Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have had profound and multidimensional impacts on community development, particularly through the destruction of physical infrastructure, disruption of local economies, and erosion of social capital. Empirical evidence indicates that recurrent communal and ethnic violence in regions such as the Middle Belt and North Central Nigeria has led to significant displacement, with over 3 million internally displaced persons recorded as of 2023, many of whom are unable to participate in productive economic activities (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023). This displacement undermines agricultural production, which remains the primary livelihood in rural communities, thereby exacerbating food insecurity and poverty levels. For instance, the World Bank (2022) reports that conflict affected states in Nigeria experience poverty rates exceeding 70 percent, compared to the national average of approximately 40 percent. Furthermore, violent conflicts result in the destruction of critical infrastructure such as schools, health facilities, roads, and markets, severely limiting access to essential services and impeding human capital development. Scholars such as Collier et al. (2003) argued that conflict creates a "development trap" in which affected communities experience persistent underdevelopment due to cycles of violence and economic stagnation.

Beyond economic and infrastructural damage, ethnic conflicts significantly weaken institutional capacity and social cohesion, both of which are essential for sustainable community development. Prolonged conflicts foster mistrust among ethnic groups, disrupt traditional governance systems, and reduce civic participation in community driven development initiatives (Justino, 2012). In Nigeria, this has manifested in weakened local governance structures and reduced effectiveness of community-based organizations, which are often critical for grassroots development. Additionally, conflict environments deter both domestic and foreign investment, limiting opportunities for economic growth and employment generation. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2021), areas affected by persistent conflict in Nigeria record substantially lower human development indices, with education and health indicators lagging significantly behind peaceful regions. The cumulative effect is a cycle of marginalization and underdevelopment, where conflict not only halts ongoing development projects but also reverses previous gains. A critical evaluation of the literature suggests that unless structural drivers such as inequality, political exclusion, and resource competition are addressed, ethnic conflicts will continue to undermine community development outcomes in Nigeria.

Strategies for Mitigating Ethnic Conflicts to Promote Sustainable Development

Ethnic conflicts represent a critical impediment to Nigeria's sustainable development agenda, with deep-seated divisions undermining national cohesion and equitable progress. Nigeria's ethnic composition has fostered persistent tensions across the nation, with conflicts including herder-farmer clashes, community violence, and insurgencies directly disrupting agricultural productivity, trade, and access to essential services (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). Ethnic segregation perpetuates economic disparities, limiting investments and hindering trade relations, while exacerbating political instability and unequal representation (Obikwelu, 2025). Furthermore, ethnic identity constructs, reinforced by the federal character principle, have institutionalized divisions that impede the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Research employing Social Identity Theory demonstrates that ethnic identity-based grievances drive widespread violence, particularly since Nigeria's democratic transition in 1999, creating anxiety and division among citizens that undermines development efforts (Aver, 2024).

Mitigating ethnic conflicts requires integrated policy approaches combining institutional reform and community-based mechanisms. Traditional institutions and community mediation systems demonstrate significant potential in resolving localized disputes, commanding respect across ethnic and occupational divides and enabling sustainable peace through restorative justice frameworks (Okoh et al., 2025). Recommendations for comprehensive mitigation include federal restructuring, citizenship reform, civic reorientation, inclusive economic planning, and enhanced dialogue mechanisms. Additionally, inter-ethnic dialogue, investing in inclusive education, cultural exchange programs, equitable resource distribution, and strengthened governance are essential strategies. These multifaceted approaches, grounded in inclusive citizenship rather than ethnic patronage, offer pathways toward converting Nigeria's diversity into a developmental asset, thereby facilitating long-term sustainable development and national unity.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel (1974) and further elaborated with Turner (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The basic tenet of the theory is that the need for positive social identity drives intergroup comparison, often producing prejudice, exclusion, and conflict when group boundaries are salient. In the context of ethnic conflict, social identity theory explains how ethnic categorization intensifies perceptions of “us” versus “them,” thereby fueling hostility and collective violence. Empirical studies in Nigeria indicate that ethnic polarization significantly undermines local development by disrupting social cohesion, economic activities, and governance structures (Alesina et al., 2016; World Bank, 2020). In Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State, where multiple ethnic groups such as the Kuteb, Chamba, and Jukun coexist, social identity theory is particularly applicable in explaining recurrent violent clashes driven by identity-based competition over land, political representation, and traditional authority. These conflicts have led to displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and weakened community level institutions, thereby constraining sustainable development outcomes.

Despite its explanatory strength, social identity theory has been criticized by Wimmer (2013) for overemphasizing psychological processes while underplaying structural factors such as political economy, state failure, and elite manipulation. Its limitation lies in its insufficient engagement with material inequalities and institutional dynamics that often trigger or sustain ethnic conflicts in African contexts. Nevertheless, the theory remains analytically useful because it illuminates the micro level mechanisms through which ethnic identities are mobilized and sustained in conflict situations. The justification for adopting social identity theory in the study of Takum LGA lies in its capacity to explain how entrenched identity boundaries perpetuate cycles of mistrust and hinder collective action necessary for community development. By foregrounding identity driven divisions, the theory provides a framework for understanding why development initiatives often fail in conflict prone settings due to lack of cooperation among groups.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of ethnic conflict on community development in Takum Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State. The mixed-methods design combined the strengths of qualitative and quantitative techniques, allowing for a more complete and nuanced exploration of the research problem. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with community leaders, government officials, and victims. These interviews provided rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals affected by ethnic conflicts. On the other hand, the quantitative component involved structured surveys, administered to a larger sample of residents in Takum LGA. The surveys gathered numerical data that could be analyzed statistically, providing a broader understanding of the prevalence and impact of ethnic conflicts on community development. By combining these methods, the study aimed to triangulate data to ensure reliability and validity. The qualitative data complemented and enhanced the statistical findings, offering a well-rounded view of the complex relationship between ethnic conflict and community development in Takum LGA.

Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of residents of Takum Local Government Area (LGA), with a specific focus on community leaders, government officials, and individuals who had been directly affected by ethnic conflict. The study recognized the importance of including a diverse range of voices to capture the multifaceted impact of ethnic tensions on community development. Community leaders, who often played pivotal roles in conflict mediation and community governance, provided valuable insights into the dynamics of ethnic conflict within the local context. Government officials, on the other hand, offered perspectives on policy responses, government interventions, and the role of the state in managing ethnic disputes. Additionally, victims of ethnic conflict were central to the study, as their experiences represented the human cost of such conflicts. By including these three categories of participants, the study ensured a comprehensive representation of different viewpoints, which helped illuminate the full scope of ethnic conflicts' impact on community development. The selection of this population allowed the study to address the research questions from both an administrative and grassroots perspective.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a combination of structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The structured questionnaires were administered to a broad sample of residents in Takum LGA to gather quantitative data on the prevalence of ethnic conflict, its effects on community development, and residents' perceptions of conflict management strategies. These questionnaires consisted of closed-ended questions to facilitate statistical analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders, government officials, and victims of ethnic conflict to gather qualitative data that provided a deeper understanding of the personal and communal experiences of ethnic conflict. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility while maintaining focus on key issues. This mixed-methods data collection approach ensured that the study captured both broad trends and in-depth, individual perspectives, providing a holistic view of the topic.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data collected were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ethnic conflict and community development. Quantitative data from the structured surveys were analyzed using frequency and percentages. These tools helped quantify the prevalence and impact of ethnic conflict across various aspects of community development, including infrastructure, social cohesion, and economic stability. The statistical analysis provided a clear, objective picture of the correlation between ethnic conflict and community development outcomes. For qualitative data from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, a thematic analysis approach was used. This involved transcribing, coding, and categorizing the responses to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant insights. The qualitative data offered a rich, narrative perspective on how ethnic conflict was perceived and experienced by different members of the community. The findings from both methods were integrated to provide a more robust and nuanced understanding of the issue, and the results were presented using tables, charts, and narratives for clarity.

Data Analysis, Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the effects of ethnic conflict on community development in Takum Local Government Area (LGA), Taraba State. It explored the primary causes of ethnic conflict, the impact of these conflicts on community development, and strategies for resolving the conflicts to promote development.

A. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents, which include gender, age, and ethnicity, are summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Items	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	73	47.4%
	Female	81	52.6%
Age Group	18-24 years	49	31.8%
	25-34 years	61	39.6%
	35 years and above	44	28.6%
Ethnicity	Jukun	59	38.3%
	Kuteb	53	34.4%
	Other ethnic groups	42	27.2%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The table shows a slight predominance of female respondents, indicating that women's perspectives are more represented, which is important given their distinct experiences and roles in conflict and peacebuilding. The age structure is largely composed of young and economically active individuals, suggesting that the findings are shaped by groups most affected by and involved in communal conflicts. Ethnically, the distribution reflects the area's diversity, with Jukun and Kuteb groups forming the majority, though this may introduce some bias in perspectives. Generally, the results highlight that gender, age, and

ethnicity are key factors influencing the dynamics of ethnic conflict and its implications for community development, underscoring the need for inclusive and balanced analysis.

The Primary Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in Takum LGA

Table 2: Primary Causes of Ethnic Conflicts

Items	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Land disputes	Yes	73	47.4%
	No	81	52.6%
Cultural differences	Yes	56	36.3%
	No	98	63.6%
Political marginalization	Yes	61	39.6%
	No	93	60.4%
Religious differences	Yes	40	26.0%
	No	114	74.0%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The findings on table two show that no single factor exclusively drives ethnic conflict in Takum LGA, though land disputes stand out as the most prominent cause, reflecting the central role of resource competition in undermining community development. Cultural differences and political marginalization also contribute significantly by weakening social cohesion and fostering exclusion, while religious differences, though less emphasized, still pose risks to peacebuilding. Overall, the causes are multidimensional, implying that effective community development requires integrated strategies addressing resource management, inclusive governance, and intergroup relations. During the interview session, the interviewee was asked to describe the nature of land disputes between the ethnic groups in Takum LGA and how they have affected community development. A 46 years male community leader narrated that:

> The land issue is at the very heart of everything. Our people have farmed these lands for generations. The Jukun were here long before the colonial boundaries were drawn. When the Tiv began migrating from Benue into our territory, they started claiming farmlands that were never theirs. Entire villages have been burned over this. We cannot build schools or roads when we are busy burying our people.

What role has government land tenure policy played in escalating or reducing these disputes?

A local government administrative officer, a 37 year old woman, stated that:

> The Land Use Act of 1978 vests all land in the Governor, but in practice, customary rights on the ground are what people live by. There is a dangerous gap between statutory law and customary practice. The government has tried to establish land tribunals, but many communities distrust the process because they see the outcomes as politically influenced. We need a more participatory approach.

As someone who lost farmland in a conflict, how has this affected your family and community?

> We lost everything. My husband cultivated yam and sorghum on that land for thirty years. One morning, men came with machetes and fire. They said the land belonged to their group. We ran with nothing. Since then, my children have not been in school. I sell firewood now just to feed them. How can we talk about development when we have no land, no home, no peace? (Male; aged 49 years from Kuteb)

The Impact of Ethnic Conflicts on Community Development

Table 3: Impact of Ethnic Conflicts on Community Development

Items	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Development projects halted	Yes	82	53.2%
	No	72	46.8%
Increased poverty	Yes	61	39.6%
	No	93	60.4%
Disruption of educational activities	Yes	68	44.2%
	No	86	55.8%
Increased insecurity	Yes	93	60.4%
	No	61	39.6%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table three presents a result on the perceived impacts of ethnic conflicts on community development, revealing that while majority (53.2%) reported halted development projects, the effects on education and poverty were less universally experienced, with 55.8% and 60.4%, respectively, reporting no disruption or increased poverty. The most dominant impact was heightened insecurity, affirmed by 60.4% of respondents, a finding that carries significant implications for a study on ethnic conflict and community development. First, the relatively split results on halted projects and educational disruption suggest that conflict impacts are not monolithic; some communities may develop resilience mechanisms or experience localized violence that spares certain sectors, implying that studies should examine contextual variables like conflict intensity, geographic proximity to violence, and pre-existing institutional capacity. Second, the lower-than-expected poverty correlation (only 39.6% reporting increased poverty) challenges simplistic causal assumptions and suggests the need to investigate temporal lag effects, informal economic adaptations, or external aid buffering. Third, the overwhelming concern about insecurity indicates that safety deficits constitute the primary conflict legacy, meaning community development studies must prioritize security sector reform, social cohesion metrics, and trust-building as prerequisites for sustainable development rather than treating security as merely one variable among many. During the interview session, a government official was asked what the state government's position is on the number of development projects that have been disrupted by ethnic conflict in Takum LGA. A 56 years old man stated that:

> I will be frank with you. Between 2016 and 2022, our records show that at least eleven capital projects budgeted specifically for Takum LGA were either abandoned, delayed by more than eighteen months, or relocated to other LGAs due to insecurity arising from ethnic conflict. The total value of those projects exceeds ₦3.2 billion. Contractors submit force majeure claims and we cannot legally compel them to return to active conflict zones. The state loses, the community loses, and the development gap widens.

You are a victim who was displaced during the 2017 conflict in Takum. Were there any ongoing community projects in your village at the time of the crisis, and what happened to them?

> Yes. An NGO, I believe, from Abuja had started building a primary health care centre for our community. They had laid the foundation and built the walls up to window level. When the fighting started, the workers left overnight and never came back. The building is still there today, unfinished, with weeds growing inside it. Every time I pass that building, I feel a deep pain. That clinic would have saved lives. My neighbour lost her child during childbirth because the nearest health facility is twelve kilometres away. That building could have changed that.

A 65 years community leader stated that:

> I can name three projects off the top of my head that were stopped because of the conflict. There was a road rehabilitation project from Takum to Chanchangi that was to be carried out in 2018 by a Kaduna-based contractor. The contractors packed up their equipment after two of their workers were attacked during the crisis between the Jukun and the Kuteb. The project was never resumed. A rural electrification project by REA was similarly suspended because the workers refused to operate in an area they considered unsafe. These are not small things; they are the foundations of development.

Strategies for Resolving Ethnic Conflicts and Enhancing Development

Table 4: Proposed Strategies for Resolving Ethnic Conflicts and Enhancing Development

Items	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Dialogue and mediation	Yes	96	62.3%
	No	58	37.7%
Inclusive political representation	Yes	79	51.3%
	No	75	48.7%
Community sensitization programs	Yes	87	56.5%
	No	67	43.5%
Government intervention	Yes	74	48.1%
	No	80	51.9%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table four revealed that among four proposed strategies for resolving ethnic conflicts and enhancing development, dialogue and mediation emerged as the most favored approach (62.3%), followed by community sensitization programs (56.5%), while inclusive political representation received modest support (51.3%) and government intervention was the only strategy rejected by a slight majority (48.1% support versus 51.9% opposition). These findings carry several implications for a study on ethnic conflict and community

development. First, the strong preference for dialogue and mediation suggests that affected communities perceive locally-driven, participatory conflict resolution mechanisms as more legitimate and effective than top-down approaches, implying that research should examine the conditions under which grassroots mediation succeeds, such as the role of traditional leaders, neutral facilitation, and inclusive stakeholder participation, rather than focusing primarily on formal institutional interventions. Second, the relatively narrow support for inclusive political representation (51.3%) indicates skepticism about whether electoral or legislative inclusion alone resolves underlying grievances, suggesting studies should investigate whether communities view political representation as symbolic rather than substantive, or whether they distinguish between descriptive representation (presence) and substantive representation (policy influence). Third, the solid endorsement of community sensitization programmes (56.5%) points to the perceived value of attitude change and intergroup contact in transforming conflict dynamics, implying that research should assess the long-term efficacy of such programs in shifting identity salience, reducing prejudice, and building social cohesion beyond temporary truces. Fourth, the rejection of government intervention as a primary strategy despite governments typically being central actors in conflict management signals a crisis of trust between communities and state institutions, suggesting that studies must examine how historical experiences of biased intervention, militarization, or state capture shape community preferences, and whether development outcomes improve when governments adopt enabling rather than directive roles. During the interview sessions, a 57 years community member was asked what makes dialogue effective or ineffective. He stated that:

> Dialogue works when it is genuine and when all parties come to the table with something real at stake. The problem we have had in Takum is that most of the dialogue sessions organized after each crisis are performative; politicians arrange them for the cameras, leaders shake hands, and three months later, the same grievances explode into violence again because nothing structural has changed. Effective dialogue must address root causes: land boundaries, resource sharing, and political representation. When we sat with the Kuteb elders in 2020 under the mediation of the Taraba State Peacebuilding Agency, we reached a three-point agreement on contested farmland boundaries that has held for four years. That worked because it was specific, documented, and followed up.

From a government standpoint, what institutional frameworks exist for dialogue and mediation in Takum LGA, and how effective have they been? A 43 years female government representative from Takum LGA noted that:

> We have three active mechanisms. The first is the Taraba State Peace Building Agency, which I represent and has facilitated over 40 mediation sessions across the state since 2015, including 12 specifically in Takum LGA. The second is the National Human Rights Commission's conflict resolution office in Jalingo, which handles formal complaints and inter-community disputes. The third is the District Heads' Council, a traditional institution that predates the current government structure. Of these, the traditional council is often the most trusted by ordinary community members because its authority derives from culture and history rather than from appointments. Our challenge is coordinating these three systems, which rarely communicate with each other and sometimes work at cross-purposes.

As someone who survived the conflict, would you trust a dialogue process to bring lasting peace, and what conditions would make you participate? A 47 years female victim narrated that:

> I want peace more than anyone. I buried my husband because of this conflict. But I will tell you honestly, I am afraid of dialogue without justice. The people who burned my house and killed my husband have not been held responsible. If I sit in a dialogue with their community leaders while those men walk free in the market, what does that teach our children? Dialogue is necessary, but it must be honest. There must be acknowledgment of what was done. There must be some accountability. Dialogue that sweeps the truth under the mat is just an agreement to pretend. Give me dialogue that tells the truth and offers something real, and I will be the first to sit at the table.

Discussion

The findings on the primary causes of ethnic conflict in Takum LGA indicate that land disputes, cultural differences, political marginalization, and religious differences are all recognized drivers, although respondents' views revealed notable divergence. Land disputes and political marginalization emerge as relatively salient, suggesting that contestation over resources and perceived exclusion from governance structures remain central triggers of communal tensions. This aligns with broader empirical scholarship, which identifies competition over land and political exclusion as structural drivers of conflict in Nigeria and other plural societies (Boone, 2014; Mustapha, 2002). Conversely, the relatively weaker attribution of conflict to religious differences and cultural diversity reflects a strand of literature that argues that identity markers alone are insufficient causes of conflict unless politicized or tied to material grievances (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). However, these findings also contrast with Krause (2011), who emphasizes the primacy of ethno-religious cleavages in explaining recurrent violence in Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt region. This disagreement suggests that in Takum LGA, socio-economic and political grievances may be more decisive than purely identity-based explanations, thereby reinforcing the need for context-specific interpretations of conflict causation.

Regarding the impact of ethnic conflicts on community development and the strategies for mitigation, the findings demonstrate that insecurity and the disruption of development initiatives constitute the most visible consequences, while poverty and educational disruption are acknowledged but less uniformly emphasized. This pattern supports existing evidence that violent conflict undermines local development by displacing populations, weakening institutions, and deterring investment (Collier et al., 2003; Justino, 2012). Nonetheless, the relatively mixed perception of poverty and educational disruption contrasts with studies that present these outcomes as near-universal consequences of protracted conflict, suggesting either variation in local experience or differences in perception among affected populations (UNDP, 2021). In terms of resolution strategies, there is strong convergence around dialogue, mediation, and community sensitization, with more divided opinions on government intervention and inclusive political representation. This aligned with conflict resolution literature that emphasizes participatory and locally grounded peacebuilding mechanisms as more sustainable than top-down approaches (Lederach, 1997), while also reflecting skepticism toward state-led interventions often perceived as ineffective or biased in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2017). However, without robust institutional reforms and state capacity, community-based strategies alone may be insufficient to address structural drivers of conflict, highlighting a tension between grassroots and state-centric approaches to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

In line with the study's objectives, the findings demonstrate that ethnic conflict in Takum LGA is driven by a combination of structural and socio-political factors, particularly land disputes, political marginalization, and cultural differences, confirming that no single cause operates in isolation. The study further established that these conflicts have significantly undermined community development, with heightened insecurity and the disruption of development projects emerging as the most pronounced effects, while impacts on poverty and education vary across communities, reflecting contextual differences in conflict intensity and resilience. Moreover, the findings revealed a strong preference for locally grounded conflict resolution strategies, especially dialogue, mediation, and community sensitization, alongside a noticeable distrust of government-led interventions. The study concluded that sustainable community development in Takum LGA cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of ethnic conflict through inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and participatory peacebuilding mechanisms that rebuild trust, strengthen social cohesion, and create a stable environment for development initiatives to thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following;

1. The Taraba State Government should establish a participatory land management framework by harmonizing statutory and customary land tenure systems through inclusive land commissions involving traditional leaders and community representatives to resolve land disputes transparently. The State House of Assembly should enact policies that ensure equitable political representation across ethnic groups, while the National Orientation Agency and civil society organizations should implement sustained inter-ethnic education and sensitization programmes to reduce cultural prejudice and identity-based tensions.

2. The State Government and security agencies should prioritize community-based security systems to address the high level of insecurity and create a safe environment for development. The Taraba State Ministry of Works and development partners should resume and protect abandoned projects through conflict-sensitive planning and security guarantees, while the Ministries of Education and Health should deploy mobile and temporary services to ensure continuity of schooling and healthcare in conflict-affected areas.

3. The Taraba State Peacebuilding Agency, in collaboration with traditional councils and local leaders, should institutionalize structured and enforceable dialogue and mediation platforms with clear agreements, monitoring mechanisms, and follow-up actions. The Federal and State Governments should play a supportive role by providing legal backing, funding, and coordination for grassroots peace initiatives, while ensuring accountability and justice mechanisms are integrated into dialogue processes to rebuild trust and ensure long-term peace and sustainable development.

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