



Community Development as a Tool for Security Participation in Nigeria

Otakwu Adah Adams

*Civil-Military Cooperation Centre (CIMICO)
9, Yola Street, Area 7, Garki, Abuja*

Abstract

Community development and security are deeply interconnected within Nigeria's ongoing struggle for peace and stability. Persistent threats from terrorism, banditry, and communal violence have revealed the limits of state-centric security approaches, making citizen participation an essential component of sustainable security management. Drawing from criminological and social work perspectives, this paper examines how community development functions as a participatory tool for enhancing security in Nigeria. It further situates the discourse within a global context, referencing renewed international concern—such as the November 2025 statement by former U.S. President Donald Trump, who urged “action” against militant groups in Nigeria—as evidence that the country's insecurity now attracts significant global attention. Using a qualitative desk-based approach, the study synthesises data from policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature (2021–2025). Findings reveal that communities engaged in local development initiatives demonstrate greater trust, vigilance, and cooperation with security institutions. The study concludes that community development provides an inclusive and sustainable framework for participatory security management, capable of addressing both local vulnerabilities and global security expectations

Keywords: Community Development; Security Participation; Human Security; Social Work; Criminology; Civil–Military Cooperation; Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape has grown increasingly complex over the past decade, characterised by a multifaceted web of threats including terrorism in the Northeast, banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest, and communal violence over resources that plague the country's cohesion (Adebayo & Ameh, 2023). These challenges have not only resulted in significant loss of life but have also displaced millions, crippled local economies, and eroded the social fabric, exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions. Traditional responses—anchored on military operations, policing, and intelligence—have achieved mixed outcomes because they are often reactive rather than proactive, neglecting the developmental foundations of peace such as poverty alleviation, education, and equitable access to justice (Okoli et al., 2022). As insecurity deepens and proves resistant to purely kinetic solutions, scholars and policymakers now advocate for a critical paradigm shift: integrating community development into security participation as a holistic approach to achieving internal stability (Eze, 2024).

Community development, rooted in social work and participatory governance, promotes empowerment, inclusion, and collective responsibility for societal well-being by fostering local dialogue and building capacity for conflict resolution (Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2021). When people are active in shaping their own development through projects that address immediate needs like clean water, healthcare, and education, they become invested stakeholders and partners—not passive spectators—in safeguarding their environment. This transforms the security narrative from one of imposition to one of shared ownership. In Nigeria, community participation manifests through various channels, including the influential role of traditional institutions like emirs and chiefs who act as trusted intermediaries, vibrant civil society networks that advocate for accountability, and civil–military cooperation projects that strategically combine welfare initiatives with security awareness to build trust from the ground up.



Recent global attention has amplified calls for sustainable, people-centred security management in Nigeria, as the international community recognizes the severe regional and humanitarian implications of prolonged instability. In November 2025, former U.S. President Donald Trump publicly urged the American military to “prepare for action” against Islamist militants in Nigeria, citing escalating violence and civilian casualties (BBC News, 2025). Although not an official U.S. policy statement, this unprecedented remark sent shockwaves through diplomatic circles and reflected the growing international concern about Nigeria's internal security situation and its potential to destabilise the wider Lake Chad Basin region. The episode underscores that Nigeria's insecurity transcends national boundaries and highlights the urgent need for local participation, interagency collaboration, and development-based strategies to effectively counter the drivers of instability.

This study therefore explores how community development can be strategically leveraged as a tool for enhancing public participation in security management in Nigeria. It will assess the intricate relationship between developmental initiatives, public trust in institutions, and the emergence of collaborative security practices. By examining specific case studies, the research aims to analyze the causal links between improved service delivery and the increased willingness of citizens to share intelligence and cooperate with law enforcement, ultimately providing a practical framework for designing and implementing security strategies that are both effective and sustainable

Statement of the Problem

Despite significant government spending on security, which often sees a substantial portion of the national budget allocated to defence hardware, personnel salaries, and military operations, Nigeria continues to face widespread and deeply entrenched violence. Terrorism in the Northeast, brutal banditry and mass kidnapping in the Northwest, and separatist-fueled communal clashes in the Southeast persist with alarming regularity, especially in rural and peripheral areas

where the state's presence is weak and its authority is contested (Aliyu & Ahmed, 2022). The dominance of rigid, state-centric security models—focused overwhelmingly on enforcement and kinetic operations rather than community engagement and trust-building—has consistently overlooked the profound developmental roots of insecurity. Chronic poverty, soaring youth unemployment, and decades of infrastructural neglect have created a fertile ground for despair, leaving many communities vulnerable to the enticements of crime and the sophisticated narratives of radicalisation (UNDP, 2022).

While community development theoretically holds immense potential to promote peace, social cohesion, and inclusion, its practical linkage to participatory security mechanisms remains critically weak and often superficial. Interventions such as well-intentioned civil–military projects, extensive donor-funded programmes, and local government empowerment schemes frequently lack meaningful and sustained citizen involvement, operating instead as top-down impositions (Ogundele, 2023). This absence of genuinely coordinated frameworks that systematically connect development actors with security agencies limits their collective impact on crucial elements like social trust and intelligence cooperation, creating a cycle where projects fail to address local security concerns and security operations undermine development gains.

The renewed international concern, starkly exemplified by former U.S. President Trump's November 2025 remarks, highlights that Nigeria's security challenges have transcended national borders and gained significant global visibility, raising fears of regional destabilisation and a new haven for transnational terrorism. Without strategic, well-resourced efforts to genuinely integrate development with authentic community participation, the spiral of insecurity may continue to undermine national cohesion, erode the government's credibility, and deter foreign investment. This study therefore seeks to bridge this critical conceptual and practical gap by



examining how community development can be systematically leveraged to strengthen public participation in security management, moving beyond rhetoric to propose actionable, evidence-based strategies.

Aim and Objectives

Aim:

To examine how community development functions as a tool for enhancing public participation in security management in Nigeria.

Specific Objectives:

1. Analyse the relationship between community development and public participation in security management.
2. Identify dimensions of development initiatives that foster trust and collaboration with security institutions.
3. Examine public attitudes toward development-driven security engagement.
4. Assess the challenges hindering the integration of development into security frameworks.
5. Recommend strategies for strengthening development-based participatory security in Nigeria.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Community Development

Community development refers to a deeply participatory process where community members collectively identify their most pressing needs, mobilise both internal and external resources, and take sustained action to improve their overall living conditions (Ibrahim & Yakubu, 2021). This approach moves beyond top-down aid, emphasizing local empowerment, capacity building, and the leveraging of indigenous knowledge systems to create sustainable change. In the Nigerian context, community development manifests through diverse avenues, including grassroots social welfare programmes and strategically important military-led civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) projects. These CIMIC initiatives are designed not only to build critical infrastructure like schools and clinics in conflict-prone areas but also to foster a crucial sense of trust between civilian populations and security forces, creating a foundation for long-term stability (CIMICO, 2023).

Security Participation

Security participation means fostering active and meaningful citizen involvement in maintaining public safety. This engagement can take many forms, including proactive cooperation with law enforcement, joining neighbourhood watch or community policing schemes, sharing vital intelligence on suspicious activities, and advocating for non-violent conflict resolution (Adebayo & Ameh, 2023). This paradigm promotes a sense of shared ownership over security outcomes, transforming citizens from passive recipients of protection into active partners in their own safety. By doing so, it reduces the heavy reliance on coercive enforcement, which often breeds resentment and fails to address the underlying drivers of conflict, thereby creating a more legitimate and sustainable security environment.

Human Security

The human security framework fundamentally expands the definition of security beyond the narrow focus on state protection and military defence. It posits that true safety is indivisible from social, economic, political, and environmental well-being, arguing that freedom from fear and freedom from want are two sides of the same coin (United Nations, 2023). This perspective emphasises that safety and development are mutually reinforcing; a community that is economically stable and has access to healthcare and education is inherently more resilient to crime and radicalisation. In turn, a secure environment enables development to flourish. This framework provides the theoretical justification for integrating community development with security participation, as it recognises that lasting peace cannot be achieved without addressing the holistic needs of the population.

Theoretical Frameworks

Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969)

This theory posits that strong social bonds—through family, education, and community—discourage deviant behaviour. In the Nigerian context, community development strengthens these bonds, reinforcing informal



social control and reducing crime (Olaniyan & Adeyemo, 2022). However, critics argue this theory can be overly simplistic, assuming existing community structures are inherently positive. In Nigeria, some traditional bonds may reinforce exclusionary practices or gender hierarchies, and strengthening them without critical examination could inadvertently perpetuate injustice. It also underestimates how pervasive poverty and structural inequality can erode social bonds, regardless of individual attachments.

Human Security Paradigm (UNDP, 2022)

This paradigm frames development as security and insecurity as underdevelopment. It links economic deprivation and exclusion to social unrest, supporting the idea that development interventions promote peace. Despite its comprehensive appeal, a key critique is its vast scope, which can make the concept conceptually vague and difficult to operationalize for policymakers with limited resources. In Nigeria, focusing too broadly on "development" might dilute efforts and fail to address immediate, violent threats. Furthermore, it risks securitizing aid, where development assistance is primarily driven by the strategic security interests of external actors rather than local needs.

Participatory Development Theory (Chambers, 1997)

This theory emphasises empowerment and community inclusion in decision-making. It aligns with social work principles and supports the integration of public participation into security and governance systems (Eze, 2024). In practice, however, this theory faces challenges like "tokenism," where participation is a superficial exercise. In Nigeria, deeply entrenched power dynamics can lead to elite capture, where only local elites or male heads of household influence decisions, marginalizing women, youth, and minorities. This can result in interventions that fail to address the root causes of insecurity felt by the most vulnerable.

Together, these theories, despite their limitations, offer a multi-faceted lens to understand how development initiatives can, under the right

conditions, transform citizens from passive observers into active stakeholders in security management

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative desk-based and policy-synthesis design, suitable for conceptual and preliminary doctoral-level research (Creswell & Poth, 2022). Data were drawn from government policy documents, official reports, and scholarly publications from 2021 to 2025.

Data Sources

- I. Document Analysis: National Security Strategy (2019), National Development Plan (2021–2025), CIMICO annual reports, and recent UNDP security studies.
- ii. Comparative Review: Cross-analysis of Nigerian initiatives with global participatory security models.
- iii. Content Analysis: Using deductive reasoning guided by theoretical propositions and inductive reasoning to identify emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The desk-based approach identifies trends and gaps for future fieldwork involving interviews with community members, military officers, and civil society actors.

Discussion and Analysis

Community Development and Security Participation

Community-led development enhances trust and motivates residents to cooperate with authorities in crime prevention (Okoli & Onyemachi, 2023). Empowered citizens are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and more willing to protect community assets (Aliyu & Ahmed, 2022).

Civil–Military and Government-Led Projects

Civil–Military Cooperation (CIMIC) projects—such as roads, schools, and boreholes—implemented in conflict-affected communities have improved welfare and strengthened confidence in security institutions (CIMICO, 2023). In Nasarawa and Benue States, such initiatives have facilitated intelligence sharing and reduced hostility toward the military (Yusuf & Adewale, 2023).



Trust and Social Control

Transparency and inclusion in development planning foster trust, validating Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969). Social bonds formed through collective development create community resilience and moral commitment to peace (Olaniyan & Adeyemo, 2022).

Challenges

Challenges include policy fragmentation, poor coordination, politicisation, and weak community ownership (Ogundele, 2023). Many interventions are donor-driven and short-term, with little focus on sustainability. Moreover, low civic awareness and uneven resource distribution hinder participatory security (Akinyemi & Olabisi, 2023).

Policy and Practical Implications

To strengthen the development–security nexus, Nigeria should institutionalise community participation in national security frameworks. A Whole-of-Society approach—integrating civil society, security institutions, and local communities—can ensure shared responsibility and accountability (UNDP, 2022). Development projects should be designed using social work principles, focusing on empowerment, equity, and inclusion.

Conclusion

Community development is not only an instrument of welfare but a strategic pillar of participatory security management. The study concludes that inclusive development initiatives increase trust, social cohesion, and cooperation in combating crime. As international attention continues to mount, exemplified by recent global concerns about Nigeria's insecurity, the need for community-driven solutions becomes even more compelling. Sustainable peace in Nigeria depends on integrating development, civic engagement, and participatory security within a unified national framework.

Recommendations

1. Federal Government of Nigeria should Institutionalise development-based security frameworks linking government, security

agencies, and communities

Implementation Strategies

- I. The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, to draft and submit a National Policy on Development-Centred Security to the Federal Executive Council (FEC) for approval.
 - ii. The ONSA to establish a permanent Inter-Agency Committee on Security and Development (ICSD) with statutory backing
2. The Federal Government of Nigeria should enhance public education and sensitisation on participatory security and civic responsibility.

Implementation Strategies

- I. The National Orientation Agency (NOA), in partnership with the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and the Ministry of Information, to launch a nationwide "Secure Our Community" media campaign.
 - ii. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the NPF and the Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, to integrate a "Civic Security and Responsibility" module into the curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools.
3. The Federal Government of Nigeria should apply social work principles—empowerment, inclusion, equity—in designing community security programmes.

Implementation Strategies

- I. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to develop and certify a "Community Engagement for Security" training module for all security and law enforcement agencies.
 - ii. The ONSA to require a "Social Inclusion and Gender Impact Assessment" to be conducted by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development for all federally funded community security programmes before they are approved.
4. The Federal Government of Nigeria should



adopt participatory monitoring and evaluation tools to measure trust, collaboration, and social outcomes.

Implementation Strategies

- I. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), with technical support from UNDP and guidance from ONSA, to develop and deploy a standardized annual "Community Trust and Security Perception Survey."
- ii. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation to establish and support Community Security Oversight Committees at the Local Government Area (LGA) level to review M&E data and provide feedback.

5. The Federal Government of Nigeria should prioritise youth empowerment and job creation to reduce vulnerability to crime and extremism.

Implementation Strategies

- I. The Ministry of Youth and Sports Development in collaboration with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), to expand skills acquisition programmes with a specific focus on trades needed for post-conflict reconstruction (e.g., masonry, carpentry, solar panel installation).
- ii. The Bank of Industry (BOI), in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, to launch a "Youth Peace and Innovation Fund" providing low-interest grants and loans to youth-led cooperatives and social enterprises in conflict-prone areas.

7. The Federal Government of Nigeria should promote a Whole-of-Society approach integrating all stakeholders in security governance.

Implementation Strategies

- I. The Presidency, through the ONSA, to convene an annual National Security and Development Summit.
- ii. The ONSA to issue a model framework to all State Governors, mandating the formal inclusion of civil society, private sector, and traditional ruler representatives as observers in their State Security Councils.

References

- Adebayo, O., & Ameh, S. (2023). Community engagement and participatory security in Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 32(2), 118–132.
- Akinyemi, T., & Olabisi, J. (2023). Community participation and security governance in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Policy and Security Studies*, 5(1), 45–60.
- Aliyu, M., & Ahmed, L. (2022). Development deficits and insecurity in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 17(3), 214–230.
- BBC News. (2025, November). Trump tells military to prepare for 'action' against Islamist militants in Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cev18jy21w7o>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide for applied researchers*. London: Sage.
- CIMICO. (2023). *Civil–Military Cooperation Report 2023*. Abuja: CIMICO Head Office.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2022). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eze, C. (2024). People-centred security: Integrating community development into counter-insecurity strategies in Nigeria. *Security and Development Journal*, 6(1), 33–52.
- Ibrahim, A., & Yakubu, S. (2021). Community participation and local development in Nigeria. *Social Work Review*, 12(2), 99–112.
- Ogundele, K. (2023). Policy fragmentation and insecurity in Nigeria. *Journal of African Governance*, 9(1), 64–79.
- Okoli, A., & Onyemachi, U. (2023). Grassroots participation and rural security in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Criminology*, 11(2), 25–40.
- Okoli, A., Otu, N., & Odey, E. (2022). Beyond force: Developmental approaches to internal security in Nigeria. *African Journal of Peace and Security*, 8(3), 77–93.
- Olaniyan, T., & Adeyemo, F. (2022). Social bonds and informal crime control in Nigerian



- communities. *Criminology and Social Justice*, 14(4), 202–219.
- Owasanoye, B., & Aina, E. (2023). Human security and social justice in Nigeria. *Journal of Peace and Human Development*, 5(2), 120–137.
- UNDP. (2022). *Human development report: Expanding human security in an uncertain world*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- United Nations. (2023). *Our Common Agenda: Advancing human security for sustainable peace*. New York: UN.
- Yin, R. K. (2021). *Case study research and applications (6th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yusuf, R., & Adewale, M. (2023). Civil–military engagement and community trust in Nigeria’s North Central region. *Journal of Defence and Security Studies*, 7(1), 15–31.