



international
alert
NIGERIA

RESEARCH PAPER

Analysis of northwest Nigeria's political, economic and conflict realities

Evidence from Katsina and Zamfara states

List of acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CC	Climate Change
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
IA	International Alert
KII	Key Interview Informant
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NPF	Nigeria Police Force

Table of contents

About the study	iii
Executive summary	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Trends in the political, economic and conflict landscape in northwest Nigeria	3
2.1 Banditry, illicit mining and criminal networks	6
2.2 Environmental insecurity	7
2.3 Rural livelihood systems and natural resource governance	9
3. Existing policies and legislation – natural resource management	10
4. Accessing justice and non-military response initiative	11
5. Conclusion	15
Recommendations	15
Appendix	19
Annex 1 – Figures	19
Figure 3: Environmental security issues in Katsina state	20
Figure 4: Environmental security issues in Zamfara	20
Figure 5: Causes of natural resource induced conflict in Katsina	20
Figure 6: Causes of natural resource induced conflict in Zamfara	20
Figure 7: Women participation in decision making, Katsina	21
Figure 8: Women participation in decision making, Zamfara	21
Annex 2 – Tables	22
Table 1: Factors that fuels conflict in Katsina and Zamfara states	22
Table 2: Constraints faced by farmers in Katsina and Zamfara states	22
Table 3: Measures that best address the constraints in Katsina and Zamfara agriculture sector	23
Table 4: Actors that influence natural resource policies in Katsina and Zamfara	23
Endnotes	24

About the study

For several years, Nigeria's northwest has been facing diverse security challenges due, in part, to the actions of bandits and illicit mining groups that have taken root in the vast territories of the region, capturing territory ostensibly under the authority of the government. Likewise, the adverse impact of climate change and the state implementation of natural resource management policies coupled with limited access to justice by citizens constitutes a threat to sustained peace and stability in the region. This has implications for livelihood predominantly in the rural areas where majority of the population are dependent on natural resources such as forest (wood and non-wood resources), water, arable and grazing land as a source of income.

In a policy roundtable organised by International Alert and the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria Programme (SPRING) in February 2025, participants from the northwest called for an exploration of alternative dispute resolution and the localisation of the implementation of natural resource management policies at the community level as a means of responding to the region's unique human security challenges. Hence International Alert (IA) commissioned a study on the topic "Analysis of Northwest's Political, Economic and Conflict Realities: Evidence from Katsina and Zamfara States". The primary purpose of this study was to analyse and examine the political, economic and conflict realities of northwest Nigeria from the perspective of the implementation of natural resource management policies. The analysis focused on Katsina and Zamfara states.

Executive summary

For more than a decade, the northwest region of Nigeria which has long been beset by political, economic and environmental crisis, has been caught up in a spiral of violence against which the effectiveness of the security response predicted in the past appears to be declining. The conflict in the region, characterised by armed banditry, violent illicit mining groups and farmer-herders' conflicts are symptoms of ineffective implementation of natural resource management policies, particularly at the state and local governance level. In most cases, it is caused by the government exclusion of crucial groups or stakeholders at the community level in the formulation and management of natural resource management policies. It is also due to the lack of low levels of productive investments in these areas, that is the extractive mining industry and value-added agriculture sector.

The lack of protection of livelihoods due to climate change induced outcomes, particularly in rural communities has weakened confidence in the government and served as an incentive to join criminal networks. Since the manifestation of the northwest's security crisis, numerous initiatives by the government have been undertaken with emphasis on military operations. These operations include but not limited to Operation Fansar Yamma, Operation Handarin Daji, Operation Hadin Kai, Operation Whirl Stroke and Operation Safe Haven. Despite the recorded successes of these operations, the issue of competition for natural resources and its implication for the region's socio-economic security remains. Hence relevant actors, particularly at the community level and members of civil societies such as IA are calling for active inclusion of a non-military conflict resolution strategy. The option of effective and inclusive management of natural resources is at the forefront of stakeholders recommended conflict resolution strategy. Yet, the issue of competing interests among stakeholders and the perceived ethno-religious dynamics of natural resource induced conflicts could serve as an impediment if not properly managed.

This report examines the political, economic and conflict realities of the northwest from the perspective of natural resource induced challenges and explores the inclusion of effective natural resource management policy as a strategy for dealing with identified conflicts in the region. It is based on data from literature and several interviews and questionnaire survey conducted within a wide range of informants and participants in Katsina and Zamfara states. This report presents an analytical overview of the security landscape (political, economic and environment) and highlights major dynamics underlying the situations in target communities. It analyses the issue of the implementation of natural resource management policies as a means of managing

the security crisis and suggests alternatives where relevant.

The need to include Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) such as Multi Door Courthouse is identified through this report analysis. The option of ADR should be viewed from a holistic perspective including rehabilitation as a crucial component and should not be limited to access to procedural justice and reintegration of 'repentant bandits' into communities. Furthermore, participants during the aforementioned workshop and respondents' interviews identified meaningful investments in natural resource extraction, indicating investments in value added processes and its implication for community ownership and livelihood security. Currently because of the workshop, delegates from Katsina, Zamfara, Benue and Sokoto states are exploring the issue of effective implementation of natural resource management policies such as strengthening and enforcing existing resource management laws and the integration of conflict sensitivity resolution of natural resource management policies. However, there is the possibility that not all actors are or likely to be open to this non-military initiative, thus, military initiatives are still required. Particularly in the state's engagement with non-state armed actors. Hence all actors or stakeholders engaged in the objective for the region's economic, political and environmental stability must be sensitive to the role that mismanagement of natural resources at all levels of governance plays in the emergence and sustenance of conflict in the region.

1. Introduction

This report proposition that the current security crisis in Nigeria's northwest is tied to gaps in the implementation of the country's natural resource management policies is grounded on several issues. These issues include the status and structure of Nigeria's extractive industry (solid minerals), exploitative foreign extraction, land grab, illicit trade in natural resources by criminal networks and climate change. All these exacerbates food, economic and political insecurity in the region. This observation is manifested in frequent media reports of bandit activities, the transition of rural livelihood from licit natural resource dependent economic activities to illicit activities, the prevalence of armed vigilante groups and frequent reports of violent farmer-herder clash.¹ The upsurge of insecurity which is characteristic of the region in the last decade is a consequence of the state poor management of land competition between farmers and herders, slow response to climate change and the tacit ceding of 'ungoverned spaces' to enterprising violent criminals.

The persistence of the farmer-herders clash and the initial perceived indifference to banditry by the state led to the sustenance of these conflicts, its ethno-religious dimensions and capture of mineral rich resource territories by armed and unarmed non-state actors. With the emergence of these bandits and criminal networks coupled with economic insecurity due to climate change, this ensured the sustenance of an illicit economy and what scholars identify as war economy in the region.² This report reveals that armed conflicts in this region is sustained by bandits and criminal groups leverage of state misgovernance of natural resources to attract recruits, there is also the issue of porous borders and its implications for transnational organised crime.

The core aim of this report is achieved through the following objectives.

- An examination of northwest political, economic and conflict landscape with particular emphasis on natural resource management (Katsina and Zamfara States).
- An overview of natural resource management policies, legislation and major actors/stakeholders.
- An analysis of non-military initiatives in natural resource induced conflict.

This study adopts a qualitative study design that utilises exploratory and critical discourse analysis. The choice of this analytical method is underpinned by its usefulness in describing and explaining existing realities and examining the effects of identified events. This report draws on primary data obtained from fieldwork involving semi-structured interviews, questionnaire and focus group discussions. Other secondary sources of data utilised included books, journal articles, websites of relevant

agencies, local and international news sources and press briefings from relevant state ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

2. Trends in the political, economic and conflict landscape in northwest Nigeria

Nigeria's northwest is rich in natural resources extending from vast lands rich in solid mineral deposits (gold, amethyst, sapphire, cassiterite, marble etcetera), to a once dense forest (timber, wildlife and medicinal plants) and fertile land for grazing, food and cash crops.³ The presence of these resources, its extraction/exploitation and processing does shape economic, political and social interactions between all relevant stakeholders. Nigeria's natural resource management is characterised by resource induced conflicts in the Niger Delta and more recently in the northwest which has implications for livelihood.⁴

The perception of inequitable distribution of natural resources is evidenced by competing interests such as issues of ownership of natural resources, management of natural resources and allocation of natural resource revenue. These are crucial aspects of a country's natural resource management policy. Nigeria's natural resource management policy is quite clear on who is responsible for the management of these resources, however the issue of communal, private and state ownership of land is pivotal in the allocation of natural resource and the revenue generated from it. A concern that has fostered competition between groups dependent on land for grazing, farming and solid mineral extraction in the northwest.

Of important relevance is the issue of regulation and how much power is given to government agencies in the management of these resources at the expense of diverse host communities. Respondents noted the exclusion of community members such as women, youths and low-income earners from pertinent decision-making consultations that impacts on access, allocation and use of land resources. These observations are supported scholars who stressed the persistent exclusion of women as agents of change particularly in the development of strategies towards responding to climate change adverse impact.⁵ They argued that this hinders effective management of natural resources.⁶ The perceived mismanagement of these resources particularly water and land resource has led to the illegal occupation of land by illicit miners and more recently bandits. The implication is, limited access to land for farming, grazing and licit small scale artisanal mining, leads to competition often expressed in violence by all three groups.

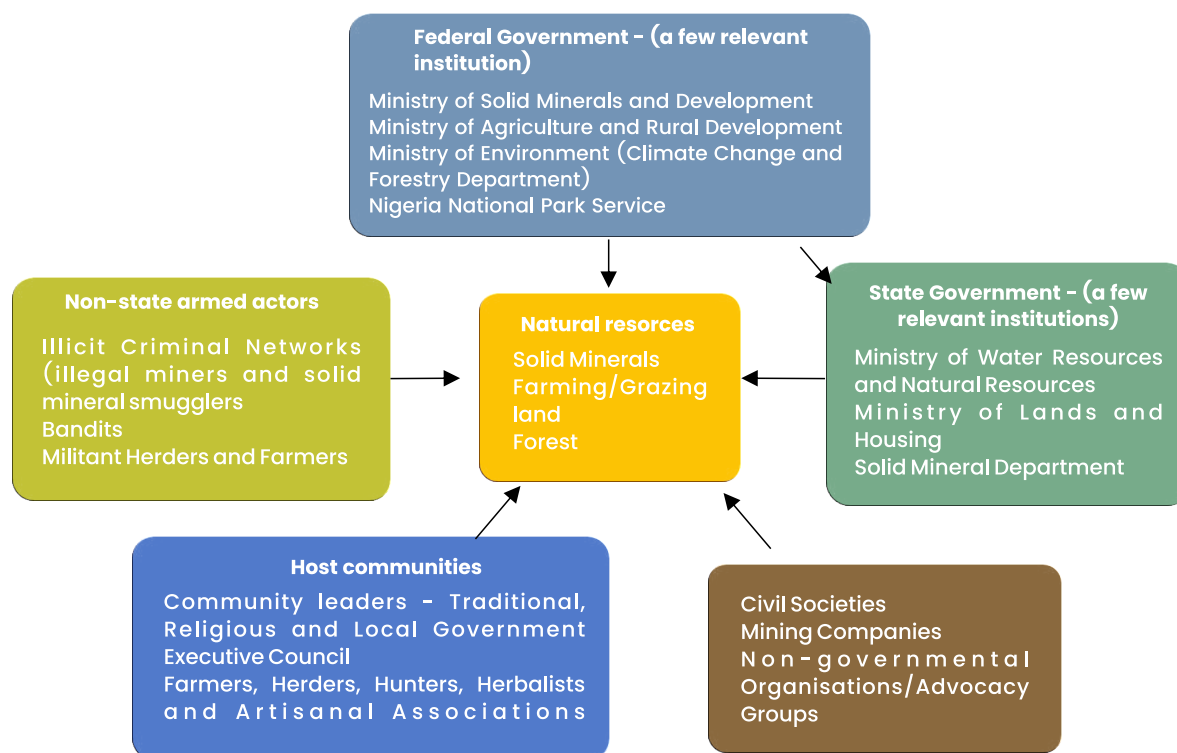
Likewise, the impact on livelihood has ensured a market for recruitment of young individuals into criminal networks or less than ideal legal mining ventures. Media reports on the mining sector in northern Nigeria indicates harmful labour practices bordering on modern day slavery.⁷ An issue rooted in a complex regulatory framework

and legal challenges that underscores overlapping responsibilities between the federal and state government control or administration of land and solid mineral resources amongst other issues. The implication is a disgruntled population, especially communities forced to relocate from their ancestral lands because of solid minerals and settled in areas too small to accommodate economic activities dependent on natural resources by both migrants and natives.⁸ Hence small-scale artisanal miners must compete for land and mining licence/lease permit with large and in some cases foreign companies. The same is indicative of herders and farmers whose access to land is hindered by exploitation/exploration of solid minerals, this has exacerbated conflict between herders and farmers competing for limited land often expressed in violence.

The politics of natural resource governance in the region underscores the power dynamics in relation to who gets access to these resources and for what period. Figure 1 depicts stakeholders in the regulation, allocation, utilisation and exploitation of natural resources in the region. The power dynamics of these actors is rooted in the level of networking or agency of stakeholders. That is, the level of cooperation that impacts on actors' influence on decision making subject to different interests, degrees of power that in turn influence their potential for participating in and benefiting from natural resource management. Note that diverse formal and informal institutions do affect the nature and performance of natural resource management in the region, from formal policies and structures to kinship, gender norms and power relations.

...we see youth groups, community leaders and NGOs as key agents of change. We try to mobilise our peers and sometimes work with religious leaders... relationships among these groups can be a bit competitive, especially when it comes to who can lead initiatives... disagreements usually arise over resource control and political power...⁹

Figure 1: Major actors in natural resource management politics in the northwest



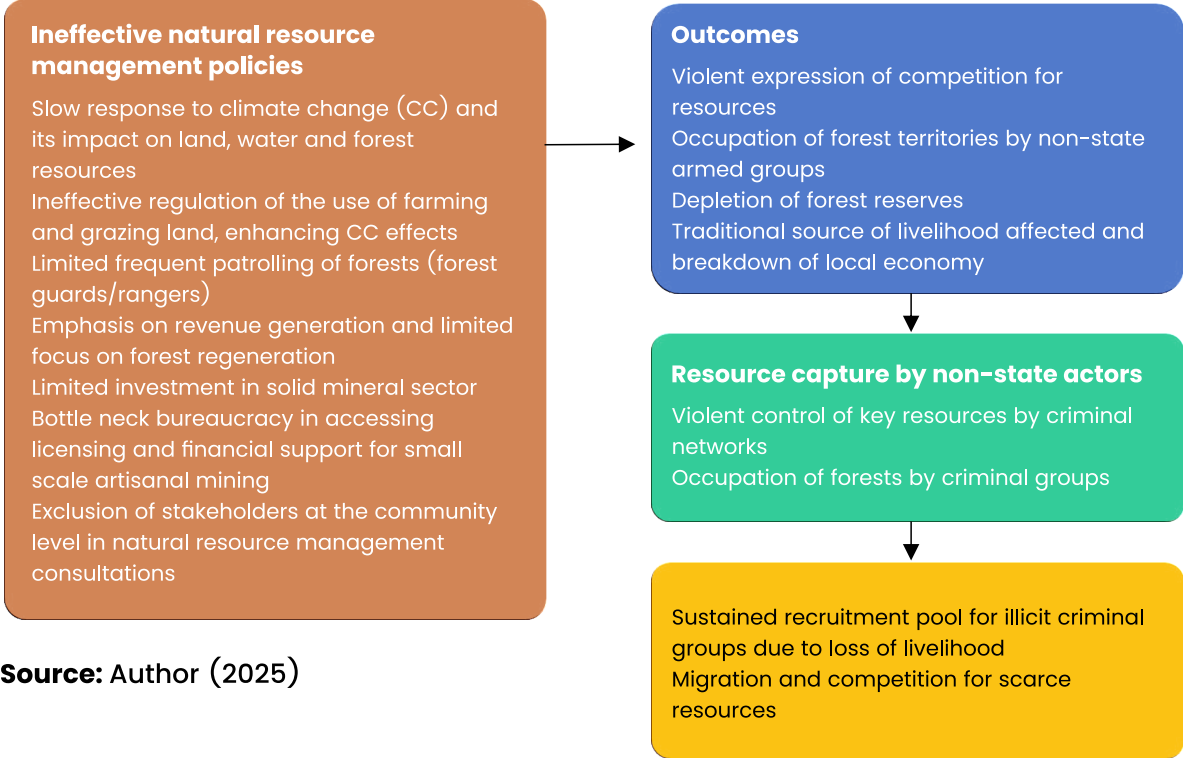
Source: Author (2025)

It is noteworthy that respondents noted low levels of coordination among all stakeholders and cited it as a barrier to effective implementation of resource management policies, especially the issue of land allocation and access for economic activities.¹⁰ The general perception is the federal government is the most powerful and influential stakeholder hence the trade-off of revenue generation over resource conservation and equity in resource allocation is believed to be at the forefront of meaningful policy implementation. The same is believed of the sub-national government. As such respondents stressed the need for NGOs, religious leaders and youth leaders to drive meaningful coordination among stakeholders noting that NGOs are “not corrupt”, and the youths are instrumental in driving change. This speaks to the level of trust between host communities and the state, yet without the support of the government, efforts by NGOs, religious leaders and youth leaders will not have the desired effect.

Studies on natural resource governance frequently explore the link between natural resources and the economy. The rationale is that natural resources do shape economic policies both at the state and individual level. Host communities depend on natural resources and expect the government to regulate the extraction and industrialisation of these resources. Failure to do so usually leads to ecological marginalisation, resource

capture and violent competition between social groups.¹¹ Figure 2 illustrates the link between identified ineffective natural resource management policies, illicit economies and sustained armed conflict in northwest Nigeria.

Figure 2: Linking ineffective natural resource management policies in the northwest to economic and political insecurity



Source: Author (2025)

2.1 Banditry, illicit mining and criminal networks

Banditry, illicit mining and cross border criminal networks have become increasingly complex with ethno-religious undertones in the region. In recent years various non-state armed groups have emerged and captured territories rich in solid mineral resources, particularly forests and farmlands. These actors ostensibly differ in their objectives,¹² however their activities are underscored by competition for natural resources and driven by economic incentives. Respondents observed increased difficulties of access to farmlands and water sources due to the presence of criminal networks as a driver of recruitment into these groups. Solid mineral deposits such as gold and zinc is a major attraction for bandits in host communities and fosters land grab believed to contain these minerals.

Scholars and respondents note that illicit mining syndicates are able to control these mineral rich lands due to tacit support from complicit government officials and lax regulation by relevant MDAs tasked with the security and distribution of natural resources such as land, forest and solid minerals.¹³ Respondents note the evolution of banditry and illicit mining activities in the region from low scale cattle rustling, looting, low level land capture and smuggling of solid minerals to large scale kidnapping, killings and violent extraction and smuggling of solid minerals. In addition, Rufus and Ogbé¹⁴ corroborates respondents' views of these criminal activities as been sustained by poor resource management policies, specifically, limited protection (forest guards patrol) of forests and limited investment in solid mineral industry.

Furthermore, the perception of the state's preference for favourable land ownership laws for farmers over herders ensured the emergence of militant herders who have set up camps in state owned forests.¹⁵ This, respondents and scholars argue has created a platform for a thriving illicit economy grounded on access to solid minerals and sustained weak border management. Ojo et al¹⁶ observed the implication of relative deprivation which this report defines as adverse impact of ineffective natural resource management policies on the livelihood of residents' dependent on natural resources as a means for survival as a principal enabler of armed banditry and illicit mining syndicates.

The issue of limited access to procedural and distributive justice in relation to access to natural resources and revenue from natural resources drives residents to depend on bandits' warlords for protection and economic security. This reinforces the 'legitimacy' of bandits control over captured territories and solid minerals. Ojo et al records the presence of foreign actors' interests in solid minerals and the complicity of government officials in the sustained smuggling of these solid minerals and its implication for the sustenance of an illicit economy of banditry and illegal mining.¹⁷

The presence of illegal foreign miners and their operational activities that leads to land degradation should not be ignored by the state. These individuals [foreign miners] do compete local miners for land access and a share in the solid mineral market...they do not seem work under the same laws as we do and hence do benefit more from solid mineral extraction¹⁸

2.2 Environmental insecurity

The prevalence of more overt forms of armed conflict ensures the relegation of environmental insecurity to the backburner of security governance activities in the region. However, the issue of oil spillage and gas flaring in Nigeria's south-south region have galvanised public discourse on the problem of environmental security.¹⁹ Likewise, global discourses on climate change, particularly issues related to desertification, flooding and toxic waste disposal in Africa underscores the security threat climate

change pose to communities in the region. Hence, respondents identified environmental insecurity as one of the outcomes of natural resource mismanagement in their communities.

Yes, climate change has hit us hard. Many young people have lost their farms because of droughts. The government usually gives some relief during disasters, but there is no long-term plan to fix the water [scarcity of water] or support modern farming practices.²⁰

They identified climate change induced deforestation, rising temperature and water scarcity as a driving factor of the adverse impact of ineffective natural resource management on violent competition for natural resources in the region. Ojewale et al argues that climate change impact in the northwest is a critical variable in the conflict between pastoralists and farmers in the region.²¹ Their analysis is grounded on the fragility of the region in terms of socio-economic variables such as dependence on rain-fed agriculture, transhumant livestock rearing, underlying ethno-religious issues and more importantly natural resource misgovernance. This has created an environment of violent competition between social and economic groups for resources. The neglect of climate change in security governance activities evidenced by the state emphasis on military interventions as a response to natural resource induced conflicts points to the sustenance of these conflicts in the region.

The threat posed by environmental insecurity is real and reflected in Zamfara state and Katsina state.

The biggest problem we face is the drying up of water sources. With trees been cut down and rainfall becoming unpredictable, agriculture suffers. Pollution from informal [illicit] mining is also becoming a concern for our youths, who depend on the land.²²

Population growth of both states is pegged at 3.6% annual growth stretching the capacity of governments to provide basic services. Likewise, its implication for equitable distribution and access to natural resources, particularly land and water for farming and grazing. In the case of Zamfara, studies²³ and respondents' views note the issue of land grab and capture by illicit criminal networks and the state inability to respond effectively. As a result, there is the issue of climate migrants and recruitment into non-state armed groups as a means of access to natural resources.

2.3 Rural livelihood systems and natural resource governance

The changing dynamics of agricultural and livelihood systems are redefining resource relations and have implications for natural resource management. The decline and capture of rural natural resource spaces (forest, mining, water, farm and grazing lands) and the attendant changes in resource access are creating issues of contestations and conflicts reflected in violence. It is pertinent to note that over 70% of the northwest population are farmers, pastoralists, small scale artisanal miners and traders in agriculture produce.²⁴ The economic potential of the northwest is rooted in its significant solid mineral deposits and large landscape for farming and animal husbandry, yet it has the highest level of poverty and an economic dependency population level on the state. Respondents and scholars record a reduction in economic viable rural agricultural livelihood, although, this change is quite heterogenous depending on the agro-economic activity.²⁵ Notwithstanding, this trend is characterised by a decline in agricultural yields largely due to illicit criminal activities and climate change coupled with ineffective resource management policies. Respondents highlighted the difficulties of farming and animal husbandry, they cited limited land and water resources, high cost of inflation (fertilizers), limited access to and affordability of relevant machinery for farming, bad roads and insecurity during transportation of farm produce to markets. The sustenance of an illicit economy of illegal mining, smuggling of solid minerals and banditry validates the transition of rural livelihood from legitimate to illegitimate dependence on natural resources.

There are also new forms of livelihood inequalities, note that economic activities of women in the rural area are largely dependent on access to land, water and forest resources. They bear the primary responsibility of obtaining firewood, fetching water and gathering minor forest produce. Majority of trade activities by women are dependent on the processing of materials sourced from the forest such as fruits, herbs, plants, animals (bush meat) and vegetables. These products are transformed to herbal medicine, soap, broom and baskets; thus, they rely heavily on natural resources for income generation.²⁶ Failure of relevant government MDAs to prevent land grab and occupation of forests by violent criminal groups exclude women from these economic activities hence deepening the socio-economic divides of women.

3. Existing policies and legislation – natural resource management

There are several MDAs authorised with the governance of natural resources at the federal and state level (see fig. 1). These organisations are tasked with the responsibility of formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of natural resource management laws and policies. The emergence of natural resource induced conflict ensured the integration of conflict resolution mechanisms in these MDAs. It is noteworthy that these MDAs do not work alone particularly in the issue of dispute settlement, there is a co-option of informal peacebuilding centers and mechanisms in dispute settlement. They include community level peace building and dispute settlement centers, usually coordinated by religious and traditional leaders. During the aforementioned workshop held in Sokoto, delegates from Benue, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states identified several laws and policies at all levels of government charged with natural resource management.

- Land Use Act of 1978: This is a federal law that authorises the governor of each state to allocate and administer the use of land.
- Anti-Open Grazing Law: This was enacted to curb conflicts between farmers and herders, this law prohibits open grazing and promoted ranching as a sustainable livestock management practice. This law is quite controversial and only effected in one state in the north central – Benue.
- National Water Resources Act: This act governs the use and management of Nigeria's water resources, ensuring equitable and sustainable utilisation of water resources.
- National Forest Policy: Aims to ensure sustainable forest management and utilisation, conserving biodiversity and supporting livelihoods.
- National Climate Change Policy and Response Strategy: This was launched in 2012 and focuses on five key sectors – agriculture, water resources, energy, forestry and human health.
- National Gender Policy: Targeted towards ensuring women's involvement in governance and resource management decisions.
- National Fisheries Policy – Regulates fishing activities, ensuring sustainability and protection of water bodies eco system.
- Minerals and Mining Act of 2007 and Minerals and Mining Regulations of 2011 – regulates amongst other responsibilities the exploitation/exploration of solid minerals including handing out licenses and access to the Solid Mineral Development Fund established by the act by small-scale artisanal mining title holders.

Respondents in their review of these polices/laws stressed the relevance of these policies but noted that there are challenges in their implementation. These challenges

include enforcement, monitoring and evaluation; resource constraints such as funding and manpower; resistance from affected groups (competing interests); inadequate infrastructure and overlapping jurisdictions. The prevalence of these challenges has served as a catalyst to outbreaks of conflicts in the region.²⁷ Respondents noted the integration of natural resource conflict/dispute resolution mechanisms such as consultations with states' peace and reconciliation commission, ADRs and mediation by community leaders such as associations, religious and traditional leaders. As such there are some success stories albeit short-lived of improved farmer-herder relations in Katsina, Zamfara and Benue states and IA's "powering peace through climate action project". In terms of access to justice, respondents noted restorative justice at the community level where offenders acknowledge wrongdoing, reparation and compensation hence fostering healing and community cohesion.

4. Accessing justice and non-military response initiative

Climate change, banditry, land grab, degradation of soil due to unregulated and illicit mining activities and occupation of forests are frequent examples of natural resource induced conflict identified by residents in Katsina and Zamfara states. The more overt forms of these conflicts in the region are at the forefront of government intervention. Despite recorded successes by the military and other enforcement agencies in capturing territories and arrest of non-state armed actors, issues such as land use/access dispute and residents' access to procedural and distributive justice are crucial in the resolution of natural resource induced conflict. As such, respondents advocated for non-military response initiatives grounded on effective justice mechanisms and the localisation of the implementation of natural resource management policies.

We need stronger enforcement of land use laws, more community consultation, and dedicated funding for conflict resolution initiatives. Capacity building for local leaders and conflict building for local leaders and conflict mediators is also essential.²⁸

Conflicts mainly start because of disputes over land and water. Farmers and herders are always arguing, and when resources are low, it turns violent. Also, our leaders do not always follow through on policies, which makes things worse.²⁹

It is noteworthy that sub-national governments' in Katsina and Zamfara states have adopted several non-military initiatives³⁰ to tackle what this report identifies as natural resource mismanagement induced conflicts in the region. These initiatives include but not limited to disaster relief aid and climate change adaptation programs. However,

respondents noted that disaster relief aid is not sustainable and does not adequately address the issue of conflict and competing access to livelihood dependent resources. Furthermore, while climate change adaptation programs are viewed as an avenue to sensitise residents and explore strategies to cope with climate change outcomes,³¹ it does not sufficiently aid in the mitigation of climate change outcomes nor address the root causes.

The government does send some relief, like distributing food and water during emergencies, but these responses are short-lived. There is little investment in long term adaptation measures like irrigation or sustainable agriculture training, which leaves communities vulnerable.³²

...Government responds because annually they conduct a lot of programs like planting of trees and environmental protection courses in schools. There are agencies...National Environmental and Regulation Agency...Green Wall Program...they are educating the people on how to adapt and perhaps solve environmental issues...we commend these efforts, but we need resource management policies to be effectively implemented particularly in equitable distribution of these resources.³³

Economic empowerment and development programs such as agricultural support programs, skill acquisition workshops and small business grants were also identified by respondents as effective strategies in addressing the negative outcomes of natural resource mismanagement policies. However, “expanding viable economic activities pool with these empowerment programs does not directly deal with the issue of competing access to land for farming and grazing”.³⁴

The strategy of offering economic incentives to bandits and illicit miners as a means of securing their surrender and discouraging recruitment into these groups was met with mixed reactions by residents. Majority believe that members of these non-state armed groups are hard-pressed to surrender because of economic incentives and the feeling of invincibility. There is the perception that economic incentives or amnesty reinforces victims view of injustice, likewise the issue of successful reintegration into the community could pose a challenge due to deficit of trust. Likewise, respondents maintain that criminals should face the law, and the notion of amnesty should be disregarded. Yet, the core driver of banditry and illicit mining syndicates requires effective implementation of natural resource management policies to deal with the issue of legitimate access to these resources for economic activities by host communities.

There are informal conflict resolution establishments in the state such as religious and traditional leaders' centres, these serves as a platform for residents to record grievances grounded on competition for natural resources, however the limited agency of community leaders serves as an impediment. Bargaining and negotiating with

bandits and illegal miners for access to captured land is quite difficult and often prove exploitative for host communities.

Community policing and the collaboration between local security networks such as the Yan Sa Kai or Zamfara Community Protection Guards and the Katsina Community Watch Corps³⁵ are perceived by host communities as useful strategies in dousing tensions between farmer and herders. This strategy involves community members working closely with the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to monitor and report criminal activities. Respondents note the sense of local ownership in the war against resource induced conflicts.

In addition, local knowledge allows for more effective identification of conflict hotspots and the implementation of timely intervention...the inclusion of traditional leaders in resource management policy development help build trust between the communities, the state and private sector stakeholders.³⁶

I can recall instances where rapid intervention by the NPF combined with community mediation helped defuse potentially violent situations. However, these are isolated cases and need to be part of a more systematic approach.³⁷

In addition, Zamfara state in collaboration with relevant NGOs approved a series of mediation programs targeted towards peaceful sharing of water resources between farmers and herders, it was largely successful due to regular dialogue and the efforts of traditional leaders. Notwithstanding the initial success, respondents revealed that sustained regular dialogue and monitoring of water use by both parties remain an issue.

We have seen some success in areas where multi-agency committees have been set up, leading to temporary resource-sharing agreements. The success factors include early intervention and the involvement of trusted community leaders³⁸

There was a time when our elders organised a sharing system for water and land. It worked because everyone agreed to follow the rules, and there was a bit of help from the local government. But after a while, some people stopped following the rules, and it did not last.³⁹

Multi Door Courthouse initiative was identified in Katsina state as an effective intervention, this platform has aided in addressing local disputes by facilitating conflict resolution through mediation, arbitration and negotiation. Notwithstanding residents' perception of access to justice, the multi door court system has limited jurisdiction on ineffective implementation of natural resource management policies. However, it does serve as a platform for compromise and development of a template for natural resource sharing amongst dispute parties.

In response to land competition for grazing and farming in Katsina state, the government provided alternative routes for cattle movement as a preventive measure to stop the cattle from feeding on farm crops. However, residents report cases of farmers planting on these grazing routes and the resultant conflict when these crops are fed on by cattle during movement to 'sanctioned' grazing spots. Likewise, ranching systems are promoted by the government as a means of addressing the conflict between farmers and herders and maximising limited land resources. Although this issue is quite controversial due to contentious views of land allocated to herders by the state for ranching as opposed to farmers purchasing, inheriting or renting communal land for farming.⁴⁰

5. Conclusion

The fight against banditry, illicit mining and cross border criminal networks, as it is conducted by the state leaves little room for meaningful strategies rooted in natural resource management. Years of continual military operations of various types in the region requires the introduction of non-military initiatives and emphasis on residents' access to procedural and distributive justice. Such non-military initiatives need to ensure the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders particularly traditional disenfranchised groups to properly situate the root cause and sustaining factors of these conflicts and avoid exploitation. It is noteworthy that climate change impact on livelihood rooted in the state's mismanagement of natural resources at the expense of residents have reinforced the perception of illicit mining and banditry as a viable economic means. Host communities with limited agency in accessing justice are faced with providing self-protection and in some cases form alliances with bandit groups, this has complicated the process of resource management and further politicised the issue.

6. Recommendations

In the context of this report and based on the lessons that emerge from respondents' feedback, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Improve stakeholder consultation and community engagement – natural resource management policy development and implementation should be a collective process that involve all stakeholders. Natural resource distribution procedures should be based on real discussions with the community representative of every relevant socio-economic group. This can be ensured through maintaining effective interagency coordination and engagement, clear communication channels among all stakeholders involved in resource use, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, sensitisation of communities on natural resource management laws and regular meetings.

I would prioritize reforms that enhance stakeholder participation and ensure that policies are evidence-based. Increased funding for research on sustainable practices is also necessary to support long-term change.⁴¹

2. Strengthen and enforce existing natural resource management laws – It is not enough to formulate policies and conduct annual reviews of these policies. State institutions tasked with the enforcement of these laws should ensure that residents

have a better understanding of these policies, their awareness of these policies provides stronger agency for host communities. Furthermore, it is important that natural resource management policies especially land allocation and illicit mining of solid minerals should be enforced. It is envisaged that residents' knowledge of these policies will aid in their demand for transparency and accountability. To achieve this recommendation, relevant MDAs and NGOs should organise workshops to educate the public on existing resource management laws. Sub-national government and national government parastatals should ensure the protection of mining sites from illegal foreign and local miners.

...reforms that ensure strict enforcement of land and resource laws, increased funding and [use of funds] for local projects and the inclusion of local voices in policy making should be prioritised by the government at all levels.⁴²

3. Promote sustainable environmental practice – All stakeholders should work towards adopting environmentally friendly processes in relation to economic dependent natural resource activities. Land policies formulated and implemented by state governments should consider the needs of farmers and herders. Furthermore, there is the need to construct environmentally friendly dams for farming and animal husbandry during dry seasons.

I would prioritize updating the legal frameworks to clearly define land rights and resource use, increasing funding for legal institutions, and enhancing community legal awareness programs.⁴³

4. Integrate conflict sensitivity resolution in natural resource management policies – Host communities rely heavily on traditional and religious leaders to settle dispute originating from natural resource competition. While this has been largely effective, it is important that conflict resolution mechanisms be integrated into natural resource management processes.

5. Increase funding and investment in mining and agriculture sectors – one of the key drivers of natural resource induced conflicts is its impact on rural livelihood. Hence, respondents suggested financial investments in mining and agricultural sectors. This could take the form of increased allocation of funds to natural resource management programs. Respondents recommended the provision of agricultural subsidies, business loans for artisanal miners and infrastructural development such as roads, irrigation projects, improved storage facilities, energy security and access to technology/machinery. There is also the need to reduce bureaucratic red tape that hinders access to mining licence for small scale artisanal miners.

6. Support the efforts of community leaders in the region, civil societies and advocacy groups should begin by identifying existing local peace agreements, based on participatory discussion with community representatives especially women,

traditional and religious leaders and customary authorities and local experts in natural resource induced conflicts. This will ensure the avoidance of subjective approaches by centering engagements on a detailed and context-specific understanding of the social, political, cultural and religious belief.

Recommendations	Implementation plan	Actors responsible	Timeline	Monitoring & evaluation
<p>Improve stakeholder consultation and community engagement</p>	<p>Stakeholder deliberation meetings</p> <p>Investigate and act on stakeholder concerns on natural resource management</p>	<p>Government officials at the state and local government level; representative of all socio-economic groups, academic and members of the press</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Every two months (report on and track implementation of deliberations)</p>
<p>Strengthen and enforce existing natural resource management laws/policies</p>	<p>Organise sensitisation workshop for stakeholders and interested host community residents on natural resource management laws and policies.</p> <p>Monitoring, evaluation and patrol activities of all natural resources' infrastructure</p>	<p>Government at all levels in collaboration with relevant NGOs</p> <p>Relevant MDAs at all governance levels</p>	<p>Bi-annually</p> <p>Weekly</p>	<p>Twice a year, a month after the workshop and generate report on participants views to tailor the next workshop agenda</p> <p>Weekly</p>

	Active desk to record and follow up on concerns and complaints on distribution and use of natural resources	Relevant MDAs at all governance levels	Daily	Monthly
Promote sustainable environmental practices	Educate all stakeholders on how to exploit natural resources through eco-friendly practices	Government at state and local levels, NGOs and academia	Quarterly	Monthly
	Research and implement findings on environmental construction of dams, farming techniques and mining exploration	Academia, NGOs - Research and government at all levels - implementation	Quarterly	
	Develop and airing of relevant jingles and short video clips on eco-friendly practice and natural resource use	Media, NGOs and government at all levels	Running all year round	
Integrate conflict sensitivity resolution in natural resource management policies	Research and identify points of conflict/dispute in the development and implementation of natural resource management policies	Academia, NGOs and Media with the support of government	Quarterly	Monthly
	Set up and activate resolution and justice mechanisms	Government at all levels in collaboration with community leaders	All year round	

Appendix

Annex 1 - Figures

Figure 3: Environmental security issues in Katsina state
Source: IA (2025)

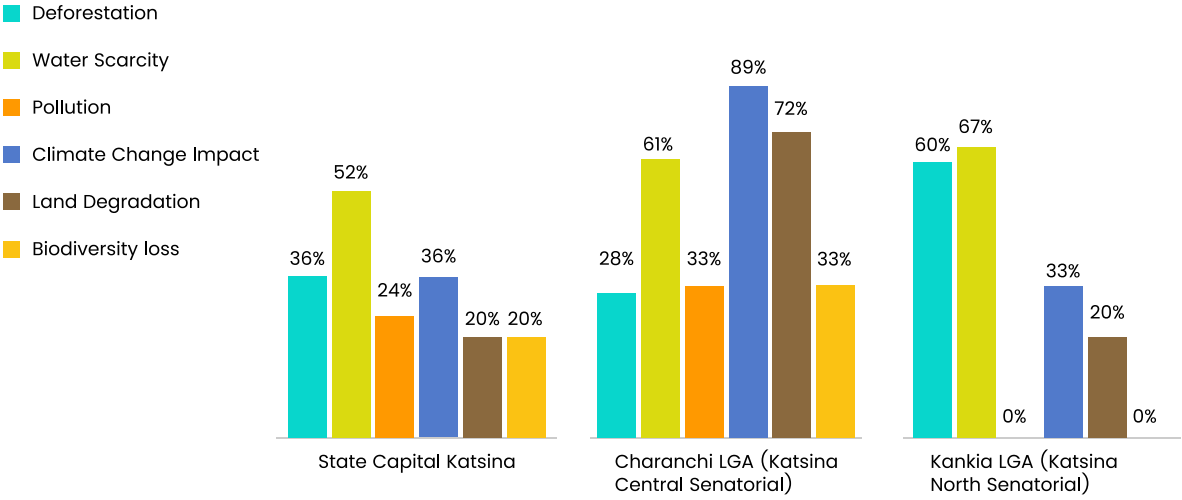


Figure 4: Environmental security issues in Zamfara state
Source: IA (2025)

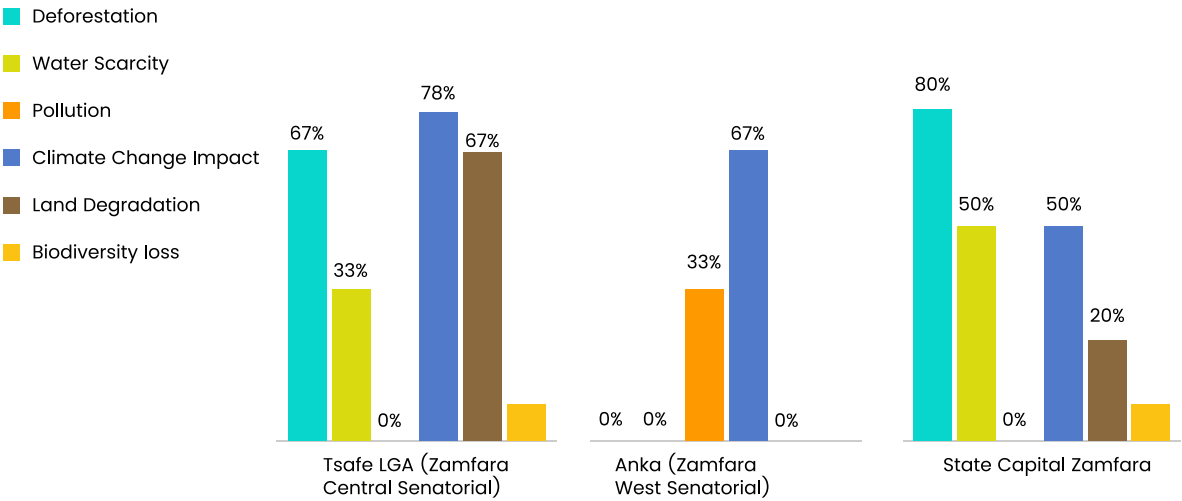


Figure 5: Causes of natural resource induced conflict in Katsina
Source: IA (2025)

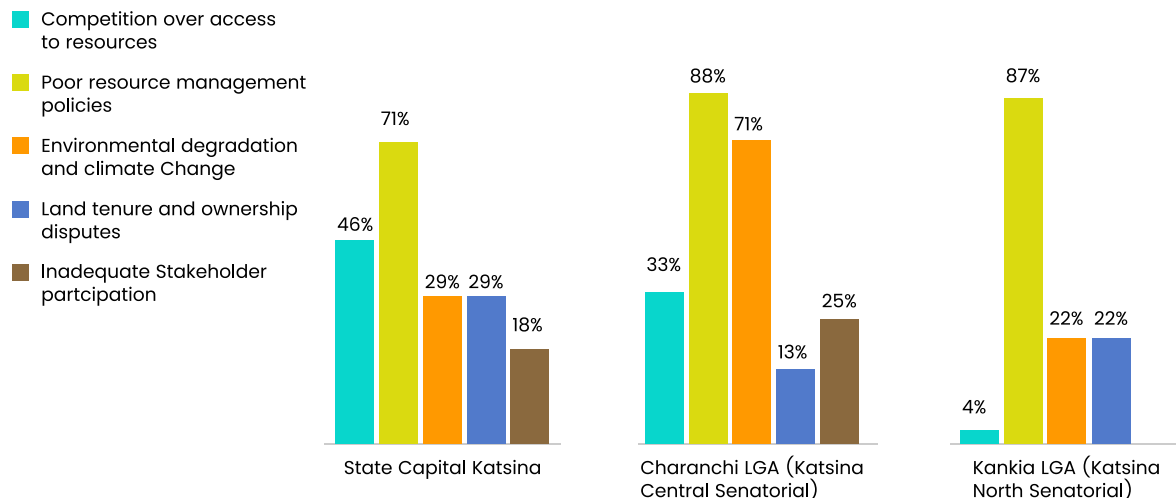


Figure 6: Causes of natural resource induced conflict in Zamfara
Source: IA (2025)

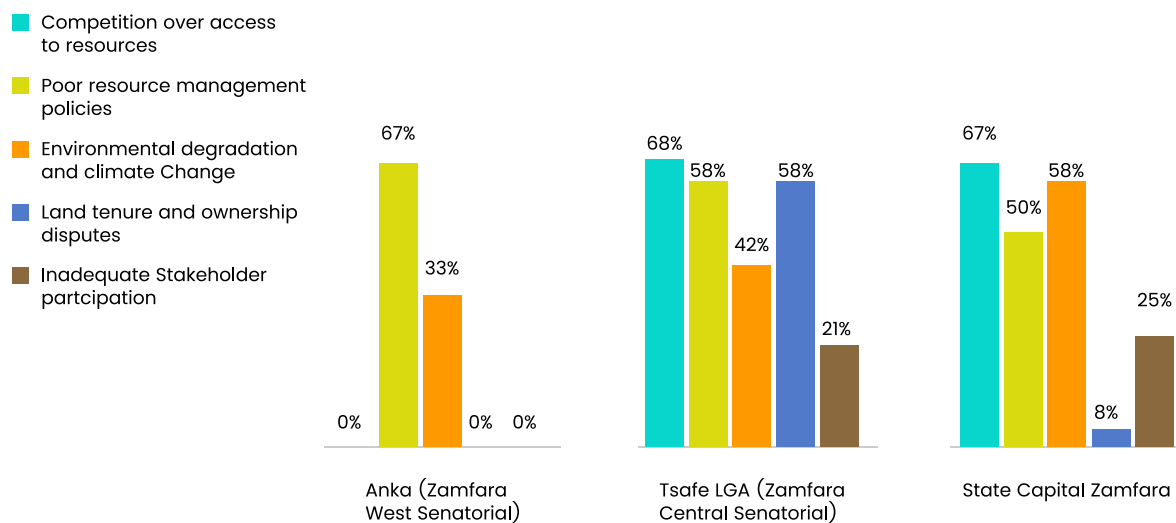


Figure 7: Women participation in decision making, Katsina
Source: IA (2025)

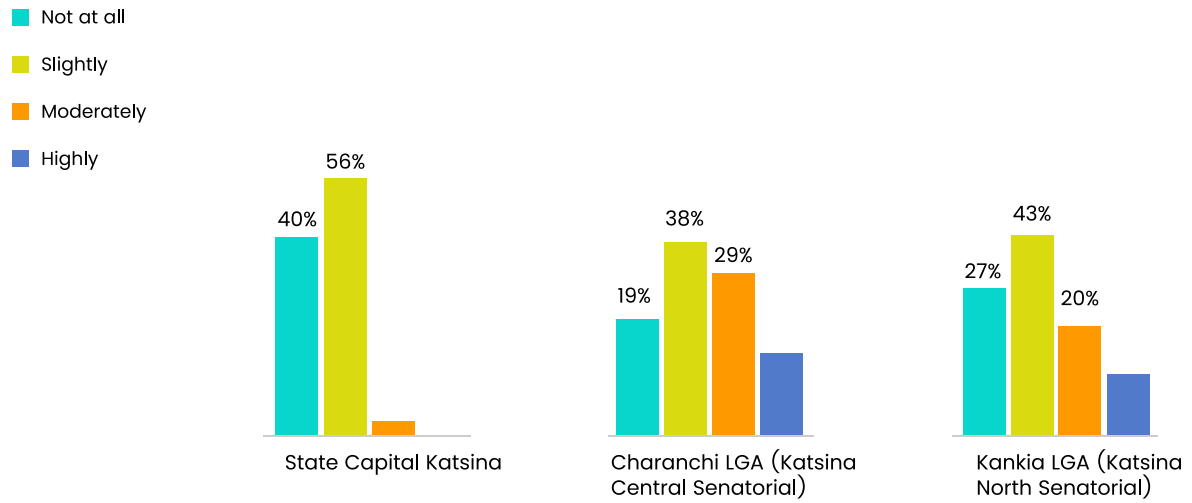
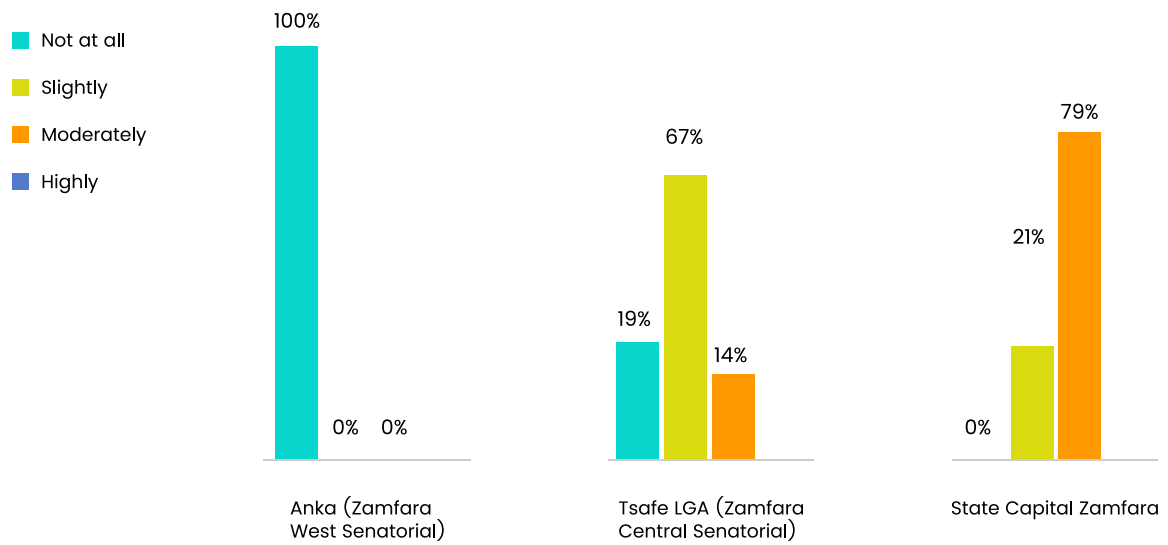


Figure 8: Women participation in decision making, Zamfara
Source: IA (2025)



Annex 2 - Tables

Table 1: Factors that fuels conflict in Katsina and Zamfara States

Source: IA (2025)

LGA	Ineffective policy implementation	Poor integration of community perspectives	Climate change impacts	Competition over natural resources	Weak governance	Others
State capital Katsina	50%	39%	29%	46%	43%	0%
Charanchi LGA (Katsina central senatorial)	32%	53%	47%	42%	63%	0%
Kankia LGA (Katsina north senatorial)	50%	42%	17%	8%	92%	0%
Anka (Zamfara west senatorial)	33%	0%	33%	0%	33%	0%
Tsafe LGA (Zamfara central senatorial)	38%	42%	50%	79%	38%	0%
State capital Zamfara	33%	83%	33%	17%	0%	0%

Table 2: Constraints faced by farmers in Katsina and Zamfara States

Source: IA (2025)

LGA	A. Lack of access to finance	B. Inadequate infrastructure	C. Land disputes	D. Climate change impacts	E. Low productivity/ outdated technology	Others
State capital Katsina	65%	40%	55%	60%	55%	5%
Charanchi LGA (Katsina central senatorial)	70%	60%	40%	70%	60%	0%
Kankia LGA (Katsina north senatorial)	90%	50%	50%	70%	60%	0%
Tsafe LGA (Zamfara central senatorial)	75%	25%	75%	75%	50%	0%
Anka (Zamfara west senatorial)	33%	0%	0%	67%	0%	0%
State capital Zamfara	67%	0%	33%	67%	67%	0%

Table 3: Measures that best address the constraints in Katsina and Zamfara Agriculture Sector

Source: IA (2025)

LGA	A. Increased funding/subsidies	B. Infrastructure development	C. Policy reforms	D. Capacity building/training	E. Technology transfer	Others
State capital Katsina	81%	38%	43%	67%	33%	5%
Charanchi LGA (Katsina central senatorial)	95%	60%	40%	70%	30%	0%
Kankia LGA (Katsina north senatorial)	47%	40%	10%	80%	40%	0%
Tsafe LGA (Zamfara central senatorial)	70%	40%	30%	70%	30%	0%
Anka (Zamfara west senatorial)	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
State capital Zamfara	100%	20%	10%	50%	50%	0%

Table 4: Actors that influence natural resource policies in Katsina and Zamfara

Source: IA (2025)

LGA	A. Government agencies (%)	B. Environmental NGOs (%)	C. Community-based organizations (%)	D. Traditional leaders (%)
State capital Katsina	75%	20%	10%	5%
Charanchi LGA (Katsina central senatorial)	~90%	~5%	~10%	15%
Kankia LGA (Katsina north senatorial)	~95%	~5%	0%	15%
Tsafe LGA (Zamfara central senatorial)	~90%	35%	~5%	20%
Anka (Zamfara west senatorial)	100%	~33%	0%	0%
State capital Zamfara	~60%	50%	20%	10%

Endnotes

- 1 Aljazeera Centre for Public Liberties and Human Rights (2025) Northwest Nigeria: A Region Under Siege by Violence and Despair. Aljazeera, 8th January. <https://liberties.aljazeera.com/en/northwest-nigeria-a-region-under-siege-by-violence-and-despair/> ; Ijaseun, D. (2024) The Deepening Despair of Nigeria's North-West Amidst Failed Security Strategies. Business Day, 8th September. <https://businessday.ng/life/article/the-deepening-despair-of-nigerias-north-west-amidst-failed-security-strategies/>
- 2 Ojo, S.J., Oyewole, S. and Aina, F. (2023) Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 19(4): 319-346. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924?needAccess=true>; Ameh, E.U. and Aliyu, T. (2023) Political Economy of Banditry in Nigeria: A Threat to National Security. *Aquino Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1).
- 3 Adeyoju, S.K. (1974) Forest Resources of Nigeria, *The Commonwealth Forestry Review*, 53(2):99-119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42605247>. Ahmed, H.A. (2023) Overview of Nigeria's Solid Mineral Potentials, Challenges and Prospects, *FUTY Journal of the Environment*, 16(1):76-91.
- 4 Osawe, I.A. and Osimen, U.G. (2023) Natural Resource Governance and Conflicts in Nigeria. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*. 4(1), 17-35. DOI:10.37745/bjmas.2022.0103.
- 5 Onwutuebe, C.J. (2019) Patriarchy and Women Vulnerability to Adverse Climate Change in Nigeria. *Sage Open*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019825914>; United Nations Environment Programme, (2013) Women and Natural Resources, Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential. https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/UN/women_natural_resource_s-_gender_and_peacebuilding.pdf; African Natural Resource Management and Investment Centre (2023) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Natural Resources Value Chains – Key Issues. African Development Bank. https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/policy_brief_gender_inclusion_in_natural_resource.pdf
- 6 Pam-Hworo, G. (2024) The Nexus of Climate Change and Gender in Nigeria's North-West Conflict. Centre for Democracy and Development. <https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/the-nexus-of-climate-and-gender-in-nigeria-s-north-west-conflict/> Fonjong, A.N. (2008) Gender Roles and Practices in Natural Resource Management in the North West Province of Cameroon. *Local Environment*, 13(5): 461-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549830701809809>
- 7 Mining Review Africa (2023) Mining in Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects. <https://www.miningreview.com/gold/mining-in-nigeria-challenges-opportunities-and-prospects/>; Olujobi, O.J. and Irumekhai, S.O. (2024) Strategies and Regulatory Measures for Combatting Illicit Mining Operations in Nigeria: A Comprehensive Legal Perspective. *Resource Policy*, 88.

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301420723011704>
- 8 Ezigbo, O. (2024) Report Highlights Child labour, Human Rights Abuses, Environmental Degradation in Nigeria's Mining Sector. Arise News, 2nd August, <https://www.arise.tv/report-highlights-child-labour-human-right-abuses-environmental-degradation-in-nigerias-mining-sector/>
 - 9 Interview, KII, Zamfara
 - 10 Ahmed, A.Y. and Olaitan, A.R. (2024) The Challenges of Deforestation and Management in Nigeria: Suggestions for Improvement. *Ghana Journal of Geography*, 16(1): 193-220. https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/policy_brief_gender_inclusion_in_natural_resource.pdf
 - 11 Seiyefa, E. and Oyosoro, I.F. (2024) Green Crime in West Africa: Uncovering the Threats to Human Security and Ecosystem Integrity in Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal. *GeoJournal*, 89-62. <https://doi-org/10.1007/s10708-024-11067-w>
 - 12 Ojo, S.J., Oyewole, S. and Aina, F. (2023) Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 19(4): 319-346. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924?needAccess=true>
 - 13 Ukaeje, O. (2021) Forest Governance and Rural Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest Region: Interrogating the Implication for National Security. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*. 11(2): 314-339. <https://www.unjpe.com/index.php/UNJPE/article/view/97/90>; Obi, K.C. and Iwuoha, C.V. (2023) Untold Story of the Expanding Armed Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest: Linking the Communal-level Collaborators. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(7): 1398-1416. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2023.2192400>
 - 14 Rufus, A.I. and Ogbe, B.E. (2025) The Rise of Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: Examining the Security Implications and Pathways to Stability. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 3(1):22-35. <https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/view/399/331>
 - 15 Obi, K.C. and Iwuoha, C.V. (2023) Untold Story of the Expanding Armed Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest: Linking the Communal-level Collaborators. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(7): 1398-1416. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2023.2192400>
 - 16 Ojo, S.J., Oyewole, S. and Aina, F. (2023) Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 19(4): 319-346. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924?needAccess=true>
 - 17 Ojo, S.J., Oyewole, S. and Aina, F. (2023) Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 19(4): 319-346. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924?needAccess=true>
 - 18 Interview, KII, Katsina State, 2025
 - 19 Alumona, I.M. and Onwuanabile, M.K. (2019) Environmental Insecurity in Nigeria in

- Internal Security Management: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons. Ed. Oshita.O.O., Alumona, I.M. and Onuoha, F.C. Palgrave MacMillian:
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-13-8215-4_10
- 20 Interview, KII, Zamfara State
- 21 Ojewale, O. Osasona, T. and Shamsudeen, Y. (2024) Climate Change and Armed Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: A Troubled Synergy of Insecurity in Armed Banditry in Nigeria: Evolution, Dynamics and Trajectories. Ed Ojo, S.J., Aina, F. and Oyewole, S. Palgrave MacMillian: United States. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-45445-5_2
- 22 Interview, KII, Zamfara State, 2025
- 23 Momale, S.B. (2023) Gendered Impact of Climate Change and Natural Resources Management in Livelihood, Conflict and Criminality in North-Western and North-Central States in Nigeria. International Alert, Abuja Nigeria.
- 24 Agu, C.F. and Ugada, M.O. (2024) Arms Proliferation and Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: Implications for National Security. Caritas Journal of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities. 3(2).
<https://caritasuniversityjournals.org/index.php/cjmssh/article/view/122/112>
- 25 Odusola, A. (2016) Nigeria: The Matrix Between Fragility of Livelihoods and Conflict. Journal of Global Initiatives Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective. 10(2),
<https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol10/iss2/3/>
- 26 Phiri, A.T, Toure, M.A.C.H., Kipkogei, O. Afokpe, M.K.P, Lamore, A.A. (2022) A Review of Gender Inclusivity in Agriculture and Natural Resources Management Under the Changing Climate in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cogent Social Sciences, 8(1),
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2021.2024674#abstract>
- 27 Adedayo, V., Fasona, M., Olorunfemi, F., Elias, P. and Oloukoi, G. (2013) An Evaluation of Policy on Natural Resource Management and Its Impacts on Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria. The Nigerian Journal of Business and Social Studies, 7(1):46-71.
<https://ir.unilag.edu.ng/handle/123456789/12068>; Raji, K. (2022) Deforestation in Nigeria. Earth.Org, 18th January, <https://earth.org/challenges-facing-policies-against-deforestation-in-nigeria/>
- 28 Interview, KII, Zamfara State
- 29 Interview, KII, Zamfara State
- 30 Jamiu, A. (2025) Nigeria Bets on Deradicalisation Program in North West. DW, 3rd March. <https://www.dw.com/en/nigeria-bets-on-deradicalization-program-in-north-west/a-71811067>; Mohammed, I. (2021) No End in Sight for Insecurity and Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria. Terrorism Monitor, 19(3).
<https://jamestown.org/program/no-end-in-sight-for-insecurity-and-banditry-in-northwestern-nigeria/>
- 31 Onuoha, F., Ojewale, O. and Akogwu, J.C. (2023) Climate Change and Natural Resource Conflict in ECOWAS and ECCAS Regions: Implications for State Security Forces. ACCORD. 14th December, <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/climate-change-and-natural-resource-conflict-in-ecowas-and-eccas-regions-implications-for-state-security-forces/>
- 32 Interview, KII, Zamfara State

- 33 Respondent from Katsina State – FGD Interview
- 34 Interview, Zamfara State, FGD.
- 35 Jimam, L. (2019) Violence and Insecurity in Northwest Nigeria: Exploring the Role and Resilience of Local Actors. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 9(2).
10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.9.2.07
- 36 Interview, Katsina State, FGD.
- 37 Interview, Zamfara State, KII.
- 38 Interview, Zamfara State, KII.
- 39 Community Leader, Zamfara State, KII
- 40 Usman, I.G., Mohammed, A.D. and Zango, N.T. (2023) Banditry and Livelihood of Small Scale Farmers in Northwestern Nigeria. *Awka Journal of International Relations*. 1(1):
288–317.
- 41 Interview, KII, Zamfara State.
- 42 Community Leader, Zamfara State, KII
- 43 Interview, Katsina State, KII

International Alert works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict with people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we bring people together to build sustainable peace.

www.international-alert.org

International Alert Nigeria
nigeria@international-alert.org
www.international-alert.org/locations/nigeria/

Registered charity no. 327553

 /International Alert

 /International Alert Nigeria

Published March 2026

© International Alert 2026. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.

Layout: Surg Creatives

Cover: © Rabiou Kabir.