



The ravages of conflict and the echoes of poverty: Community empowerment and recovery a decade after the Wukari crises in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

This study examines the historical, socio-economic, and psychological impacts of the violent conflicts that affected the Wukari communities within Taraba State. It explores the socio-economic effects of prolonged instability, social dislocation, and impoverishment, as well as the psychosocial trauma inflicted on communities. Additionally, it examines the strategies employed by socio-economically traumatized persons and communities to recover, rebuild, and transform their conflicts, thereby reclaiming their agency. The study aimed to investigate the socio-economic effects of crises, the media's influence on the recuperation phenomenon, remedial community engagement, and the contribution of community empowerment approaches to poverty alleviation and the intertwined processes of sustainable peace and social development. The researcher employed a qualitative method, utilizing in-depth interviews with forty respondents, comprising teachers, farmers, displaced persons, women, and youth who have all survived socio-occupational crises. The poverty, devastation of agricultural land, and destruction of social capital that resulted from the crises fostered social disintegration, mistrust, and resource-embedded displacement. While the national media provided only occasional coverage, local digital media played a crucial role in advancing self-help initiatives during the socio-occupational crises, as well as facilitating local social cooperation. Community resilience was demonstrated through grassroots women's cooperatives, faith-based relief efforts, and small-scale empowerment initiatives; however, the lack of state support remained a significant obstacle. This study, informed by the Social Capital Theory, posits that the restoration of the trust, networks, and cooperation dimensions of social capital is essential for sustainable recovery and must accompany the restoration of livelihoods in the Wukari Local Government Area (LGA), Taraba State. Wukari recovery, as a key conclusion of this study, should be less focused on physical reconstruction and more on bridging the recovery of empowerment and social cohesion. Therefore, this study argues that Wukari (LGA) post-conflict, the strategic recovery empowerment and resilience mechanisms, should be centered on the recovery consolidation of trust-building, empowerment, active media and social media advocacy, the implementation of the peace committee reports, operationalised with strategic public-private partnerships for the reconstruction of sustainable infrastructure, and inform the post-conflict reconstruction.

Keywords

conflict; community empowerment; recovery; resilience mechanisms; Wukari

Abstrak:

Studi ini meneliti dampak historis, sosial ekonomi, dan psikologis dari konflik kekerasan yang melanda komunitas Wukari di Negara Bagian Taraba. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dampak sosial ekonomi dari ketidakstabilan yang berkepanjangan, ketercerabutan sosial, dan kemiskinan; trauma psikososial yang diderita masyarakat; serta strategi yang digunakan individu dan komunitas yang mengalami trauma sosial ekonomi untuk pulih, membangun kembali, dan mentransformasikan konflik mereka guna merebut kembali kendali atas kehidupan mereka. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki dampak sosial ekonomi dari krisis, pengaruh media terhadap

proses pemulihan, bentuk keterlibatan komunitas yang bersifat pemulihan, serta kontribusi pendekatan pemberdayaan masyarakat terhadap pengentasan kemiskinan dan keterkaitan antara perdamaian berkelanjutan serta pembangunan sosial. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap empat puluh responden, yang terdiri atas guru, petani, pengungsi, perempuan, dan pemuda yang semuanya merupakan penyintas krisis *sosial-occupational*. Kemiskinan, kerusakan lahan pertanian, dan hancurnya modal sosial akibat krisis tersebut menimbulkan disintegrasi sosial, ketidakpercayaan, dan perpindahan penduduk yang berakar pada sumber daya. Sementara media nasional hanya memberikan liputan sesekali, media digital lokal memainkan peran penting dalam mendorong inisiatif swadaya selama krisis sosial-ekonomi serta memfasilitasi kerja sama sosial di tingkat lokal. Ketahanan masyarakat ditunjukkan melalui koperasi perempuan akar rumput, upaya bantuan berbasis keagamaan, dan inisiatif pemberdayaan berskala kecil; namun, kurangnya dukungan pemerintah tetap menjadi hambatan besar. Studi ini, yang berlandaskan pada Teori Modal Sosial, berpendapat bahwa pemulihan dimensi kepercayaan, jaringan, dan kerja sama dalam modal sosial merupakan hal yang penting bagi pemulihan berkelanjutan dan harus berjalan seiring dengan pemulihan mata pencaharian di Wilayah Pemerintahan Lokal (LGA) Wukari, Negara Bagian Taraba. Kesimpulan utama dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa pemulihan Wukari seharusnya tidak semata-mata berfokus pada rekonstruksi fisik, melainkan lebih diarahkan pada pemulihan pemberdayaan dan kohesi sosial. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pasca-konflik di Wukari (LGA), mekanisme pemberdayaan dan ketahanan strategis untuk pemulihan harus berpusat pada konsolidasi kepercayaan, pemberdayaan, advokasi melalui media dan media sosial, pelaksanaan laporan komite perdamaian, serta dioperasionalkan melalui kemitraan strategis antara sektor publik dan swasta untuk rekonstruksi infrastruktur berkelanjutan dan perencanaan pembangunan pascakonflik.

Kata Kunci

konflik; pemberdayaan masyarakat; pemulihan; mekanisme ketahanan; Wukari

1. Introduction

Conflict is an integral feature of the Nigerian landscape. Development is another. The North-East and especially Taraba State and Wukari Local Government Area, have lived through some of Nigeria's most difficult cases of ethno-religious and civilian violent conflict, communal violence and banditry, and most recently, militia attacks and insurgency. The 2009 Boko Haram insurgency, which remains an active conflict today, is one of the chief challenges of the region. Ja'afaru (2025) observes that the violence has devastating and unsustainable social and economic livelihood impacts on the citizens of the state and has enduringly manufactured and maintained destitution. Individuals were displaced from their homes, leaving them seeking state sanctuary in primary school, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, and conflict-neutral villages and towns. As a result, civil and violent conflict have caused these residents to suffer the indignity of destitution and stripped them of subsistence livelihood (Ikpe, 2020).

The Wukari crises from 2013–2014 illustrate basic hostile actions driven by religious and ethnic issues. What began as a mere football argument between two football enthusiasts later snowballed into crises with deep religious sentiment. An issue of 'identity' underlies these crises. The unbalanced spectrum of religious diversities has turned the state into a battlefield on numerous occasions (Suleimuri et al., 2021). The 2013–2015 inter-ethnic clashes in Wukari Local Government, which featured the two dominant religions of Christianity and Islam, were predisposed by politics and religion. The Wukari violent humanitarian crises affected Wukari and the entire region of Taraba, which has borne the brunt of the violence. The consequences have been devastating, and numerous humanitarian crises have been recorded and documented, including displacement (Ja'afaru, 2021; Ja'afaru, 2025).

According to the historical overview, the iteration of the Wukari unrest exhibits a deeply rooted pattern of ethnic rivalries and competition that has persisted over several decades. Violence in Wukari has built up over the years and typically peaks during periods of political unrest and economic hardship. For over three decades, the Jukun, the largest ethnic group in

Wukari Local Government Area, has been having unresolved conflicts over land boundaries with adjacent communities (Zachariah & Olisah, 2020). As land hostilities worsen, the result produces human hardship and large-scale displacement of the region's population. Displaced victims of armed violence, whose homes were razed, moved to distant locations for safety, to shelters and makeshift living arrangements with little to no access to basic survival needs (Nnorom & Odigbo, 2015; Saleh et al., 2021). The series of conflicts in Wukari led to the destruction of houses, shops, and important infrastructure, and served to worsen the already dire humanitarian conditions. This state of the Nigerian federation contains the highest number of ethnic communities and is therefore most susceptible to inter-communal violence (Yuguda and Goni in Ja'afaru et al., 2025). The Jukun-Tiv conflict has remained, and continues to be, the most significant of the historical and enduring disputes in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, with the Jukun and the Tiv as the central parties involved.

There has been a history of long-held grievances, struggles over natural resources, and rivalries for political domination. These grievances and struggles have unavoidably resulted in violent conflicts, destruction of property, and untold human suffering. The Tiv people, primarily recognised as farmers, have a rich and established cultural heritage of traditions (Amadasun et al., 2023). The Jukun, as the people of the region, also have a rich heritage of a strong cultural identity, and they have historically dominated the region's strategic land, trade routes, and resources. The two groups have experienced disputes due to population growth and economic changes, particularly during the contentious 1990s, when disputes over land and resources escalated (Amadasun et al., 2023). Each of these episodes of violence has been attributed to individual disputes. However, these individual disputes mask the problems of a deeper and more structural nature. The problems surrounding political contests for office, political representation, and the allocation of resources are at the heart of the matter. Both groups view political power as a means to gain access to resources such as quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities; thus, the domination of valuable farmland and local resources fuels violence (Nda & Obande, 2022; Nyajon, 2020).

In the context of conflicts, the media can contribute to both the possibility of conflict resolution and the potential for conflict escalation. The media may, unfortunately, escalate a conflict, deepen an involved party's already existing divisions, and inflame a situation to the point of destructive violence (Anyanwu, Imiti & Anyanwu, 2024). On the other hand, the media can also exacerbate an already hostile situation, promote rational discourse, and facilitate constructive peace initiatives. Due to the effects of some structural factors and journalist biases, the media also shape public perceptions of a crisis (Gjerazi, 2023). This phenomenon suggests that the media has a more complex role than merely transmitting information. The media may play a crucial social role as a processor and distributor of conflict and health information, a builder of knowledge and information networks, an advocate for interlinking peace and social change, and a watchdog and agenda-setter (Anyanwu, Imiti, & Anyanwu, 2024; Anagu et al., 2024).

According to McQuail in Ja'afaru (2025), the debates surrounding mass media, whether academic or public, focus on the consequences of mass media, positive or negative. These consequences involve the broad spheres of news, entertainment, and advertising. The ongoing debate concerning the power of the media seems to have reached a consensus in the field: the media outputs influence, to some degree, the thoughts, actions, and sentiments of a given audience (Lynn, 2024). With that being stated, the media has the potential to either exacerbate or mend the societal wounds. Considering the Wukari crisis in Taraba State, the media's dual function assumes unique significance. Taraba State has limited visibility on the national media in Nigeria, with most reporting taking place at the local level. Dyikuk and Obateru (2021) outline the media coverage of conflicts within the state and note that the "developing conflicts" within the region remain under-documented and at times sensationalized.

The theoretical foundations of this work are rooted in Social Capital Theory. This theory emphasises how the force of a society is measured not only by the amount of material wealth, but by the quality of the relationships, the citizens' bonds, networks, and trust. Pierre Bourdieu first articulated this theory in 1986, with subsequent developments by James Coleman in 1988

and Robert Putnam in 1993 (Portes, 2024). This theory was further developed, emphasizing the principles of cooperation, trust, and social networks, which are resources that can be utilized strategically to solve problems, achieve goals, and build strong communities among people (Tsounis & Xanthopoulou, 2024). This theory reflects that people can generate social capital by working together as families or clans, or through religious or community organisations. These partnerships enable a community to respond to economic shocks and other economic stresses, while cooperation ensures that the community is responsive to its own needs.

There has been a media freeze on the issues of the Wukari crisis, and with so much research conducted, the media has been accountable by virtue of silence, which creates a void in the accountability of the people living in these communities. Research in this area is critical and necessary for establishing sustainable civil peace and empowerment in the Wukari community. With the media's inattention, it emphasizes the need to investigate the post-conflict Wukari community and recovery efforts a decade on from the crisis.

Four objectives guided the study:

1. To gauge the socio-economic influences of the Wukari crises on affected communities.
2. To evaluate the role of the media in influencing narratives of conflict and recovery.
3. To gauge community responses, coping strategies, and resilience mechanisms after the crises.
4. To assess the potential of community empowerment initiatives in alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable peace.

2. Method

This study analyses the lasting impact of conflict and the shadow of poverty on community empowerment and recovery ten years after the Wukari crisis in Taraba State, employing qualitative methodologies. The utilisation of qualitative methodology through interviews in this instance is fitting, as it records the lived experiences, narratives, and realities of the people who encountered the Wukari crises socio-economically and psychosocially. Quantitative research is often criticized for being impersonal and lacking the contextual depth that arises from the data. In contrast, qualitative research provides explanations for socio-economic and psychological variables, as well as the issues and challenges that conflict brings to a community (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2024). It elaborates on the socio-economic and psychosocial dimensions of conflict in communities, the often-dominant role of media in conflict narratives and recovery, and the social structures that communities weave and reshape for survival. The use of qualitative methodology is also a consequence of other research on Wukari conflicts, which has adopted qualitative methodologies through interviews (Igbashangev & Ogunyemi, 2022; Suleimuri et al., 2021).

According to the National Population Commission (NPC), Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) in Taraba State is home to 374,800 individuals (City Population, 2022). This figure serves as the basis for the population from which participants were drawn for the current study. The study population individuals were people, directly or indirectly, affected in the 2013–2015 Wukari conflicts, as well as traditional leaders, the farming population, the displaced, women in trade, teachers, journalists, civil society organisation (CSO) members, religious leaders, the active youth, traders, and ordinary members of the Wukari LGA. These individuals were from the following settlements or districts: Avyi, Akwana, Kente, Wukari, Chonku, Bantaje, Jibu, Rafin-Kada, Matar-Fada, Arufu, Tsokundi, Nwokyo, Gidan-Idi, and Chinkai.

For the in-depth qualitative study, a sample was also drawn from this population. This study included a sample of 40 participants, drawn from diverse social backgrounds and conflicting streams of recovery and empowerment. The purposive sampling technique was employed to deliberately identify individuals with firsthand experiences and relevant knowledge of the crises, their socio-economic consequences, and the role of the media and community initiatives in post-conflict recovery. This approach enabled the collection of rich contextual data necessary for answering the study's questions.

The sample size of forty respondents was determined based on qualitative research principles, which prioritise depth of understanding over numerical generalisation. Ethical

considerations also contributed to determining the sample size. The sample size was sufficiently large to help achieve data saturation. It occurs when a researcher reaches a point in the interviews at which no additional significant themes emerge. At the same time, the sample size was small enough to avoid the unnecessary encumbrance of participants. This equilibrium respects the participants' time, and the emotional strain caused by the remembrances of traumatic events was as low as possible.

The interviews spanned a six-month period, from March to August 2025. Out of forty interviews, twenty-nine were conducted in the town of Wukari, Taraba State, while the remaining eleven were remote interviews over mobile and internet-based platforms due to accessibility and logistics issues. This combined approach was intended to reach participants who were displaced or located in areas with limited mobility. Participants were aged between 25 and 70 years, representing different genders, professions, and social roles, which created an inclusive diversity of the Wukari community. The diversity of the respondents' social and professional backgrounds was beneficial for data enhancement in multiple ways; the diversity of experiences, coping mechanisms, and recovery constructions was invaluable.

To ethically prepare for each participant and prevent any conflicts related to the ethical issues and principles of confidentiality, the study guidelines were sent, and informed consent was obtained. When the findings were discussed, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the study respondents. To safeguard the identities of privacy-sensitive respondents, any revealing descriptive details were omitted or generalised to the broad category. Along with the dignity, anonymity, and data confidentiality of the respondents, these principles were maintained throughout the study.

To conduct this study, in-depth interviews were the only method of data collection. This approach enables participants to capture and express their experiences related to the Wukari conflicts, their aftermath, the triggering factors of the crises, and the community. Interviews are also useful for gathering qualitative data because they allow participants to provide explanations for their responses. For each interview, a semi-structured interview guide was used for each interview session. Each interview guide was built around four key themes: (1) the socio-economic impacts of the Wukari crises on the people and communities directly affected, (2) the role of the media in framing the conflicts and narratives of recovery, (3) community strategies, responses, and resilience systems to cope with and recover from the crises, and (4) community initiatives towards poverty alleviation and sustainable peace. A conversational style of interview was employed, and lasted 25 to 30 minutes in a predetermined, private setting with minimal distractions, to help participants feel comfortable and ensure that honest responses were given throughout the session.

Thematic analysis entailed harmonisation of the collected data with the research objectives. This involved recording the interviews on tape and coding them under the dominant themes and subthemes. This strategy enabled the expression of both the convergence and divergence of participants' experiences, as well as their multiplicity of voices. The thematic analysis was the best approach to adopt in this research, as it focused on the people of Wukari and how they perceived the conflict that had befallen their community, as well as the post-war activities aimed at reclaiming their land. The paper has also identified and discussed the contextual and socio-economically motivated forces that also influence the results of the conflicts in the Wukari LGA. The qualitative design, which included in-depth interviews based on purposive sampling and thematic analysis, enabled the study to reveal rich, contextually relevant information regarding the nature of conflicts and the displacements experienced in and around Nigeria's hinterlands. Such a design will provide an opportunity to capture and evaluate narratives at the depth at which they have leverage in the policy space, particularly in terms of post-conflict policy provisions in transitional situations.

3. Results

This sub-section presents results and discusses the socio-economic influences of the Wukari crises on affected communities. Results are presented in themes, along with illustrative responses from participants and their accompanying interpretations.

3.1 Socio-Economic Influences of the Wukari Crises on Affected Communities

This section reveals how the Wukari crises transformed the lives of individuals within the region, on both social and economic levels. It examines the effects of the fight on the lives of people, their professions, and the lifestyles of people in various communities of Wukari. The table highlights some of the issues people discussed in the field, including loss of employment, increasing living standards, and difficulty forming relationships within society.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Influences of the Wukari Crises on Affected Communities

Objective	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses from Participants	Interpretation / Implication
Gauge the socio-economic influences of the Wukari crises on affected communities.	Loss of livelihoods and economic hardship	"Before the crisis, I had three farmlands. Now, I cultivate only half an acre. Hunger has become normal in my household." (Male Farmer, 60, Nwokyo). "My shop was burnt during the crisis. Even after ten years, I am still struggling to restart my business." (Female Trader, 45, Avyi).	Livelihoods were severely disrupted, leaving families trapped in poverty and food insecurity. The destruction of farmlands, businesses, and local markets has slowed economic recovery.
	Rising costs of living	"Before the Wukari crises, a bag of cement cost ₦1,500; now it is over ₦10,000." (Male, 58, Chinkai). "I only struggle to survive. My job disappeared when the agro-chemical company I was working with left Wukari." (Female, 40, Wukari).	Inflation, job losses, and destruction of property have compounded hardship. The crisis created structural poverty that persists due to weak recovery support.
	Breakdown of communal lifestyle	"Time has passed, wounds have healed, but now we live in a fractured society full of fear and mistrust." (Female, 55, Jibu).	The violence eroded interethnic and interfaith harmony, replacing unity with segregation and suspicion.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

As shown in Table 1, the economy has been deteriorating over time. Many people are no longer employed, the cost of living has significantly increased, and no one has been able to maintain the social structure within the community. This discovery gains richness from the voices of the field. One man, a farmer in the village, Nwokyo, said he used to have three farms before the crisis, but now he has just half an acre of farmland. One of the women who is a marketer, Avyi said, "I had my shop burnt down in the crisis, and another individual told me, Hunger has become part of my life, and I still cannot recover my business ten years later." (Fieldwork, 2025). These tales do not merely discuss loss, but also demonstrate the way that the power to work has been transformed. The destruction of farms and markets results in the loss of long-term assets, such as seed stock, tools, credit relationships, and market networks that are either nonexistent or extremely poor. It exacerbates the loss of revenue.

Moreover, they also mentioned inflationary pressure, and the respondents stated that a bag of cement, which was N1,500 yesterday, is now selling for more than N10,000 today. It indicates that the rebuilding costs have increased at a rate higher than the recovery of people. It has rendered rebuilding for the survivors impossible, even when they desire to and have the social capital to do so. The second-order effect, illustrated in the table by the older person's comment about living in a fractured society full of fear and mistrust, is the breakdown of the communal lifestyle. The inability to engage in reciprocal labour, informal funding, and shared labour, which are prevalent in farm communities, makes people less resilient. It illustrates that repairing trust is just as vital for the economy as rebuilding the economy itself. Therefore, Table 1 shows that the Wukari crises led to a compound crisis, characterized by both an immediate loss of jobs and long-term economic exclusion. This means that both asset restitution (such as

tools, land access, and financial resources) and social repair (such as rebuilding trust and re-establishing market connections) are necessary.



Figure 1. A burnt building in Wukari turned into a refuse dump. It symbolises total relinquishment, community neglect, and the ruin of post-crisis salvage efforts.



Figure 2. A razed house in Wukari. It shows a strong reminder of how the violence destroyed families, culture, and safety during the peak of the conflict.



Figure 3. Burnt shops in Wukari. They demonstrate that traders and families lost a significant amount of money, which negatively impacted the local economy.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 depict the transformation of what was once a vibrant commercial hub into a pile of rubble. Several ravaged buildings still stand at No. 33 Dikko/Sambo Street, Wukari, Taraba State—structures that were razed during the series of crises in 2014. These images, captured on September 22, 2025, illustrate the lingering scars of conflict and the slow pace of recovery in the area, based on the author's compilation from fieldwork conducted in 2025.

3.2 Media's Role in Influencing Narratives of Conflict and Recovery

This subsection illustrates how the media influences the narrative surrounding the Wukari crisis. It discusses what people think about how effectively social and mainstream media do in raising awareness, reporting, and speaking out. The table lists the most important aspects that emerged in the interviews regarding how traditional media covers topics, how people use social media, and the problems with communication.

Table 2. The Role of the Media in Influencing Narratives of Conflict and Recovery

Objective	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses from Participants	Interpretation / Implication
Evaluate the role of the media in influencing narratives of conflict and recovery	Role of mainstream media	"The media reported the killings but abandoned us afterward. It was just breaking news and that was it." (Male Teacher, 40, Arufu).	Traditional media have failed to provide sustained coverage, resulting in a gap in public awareness and neglect of recovery needs.
	Rise of social media	"We use Facebook and WhatsApp to draw attention to our plight." (Female Youth, 37, Avyi).	Social media became a vital advocacy tool, helping communities amplify their voices and demand attention.
	Communication gap	"Without social media, the world would have forgotten Wukari completely." (Community Elder, 42, Gidan-idi).	Digital media filled the communication void left by traditional outlets.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

Table 2 indicates that social media receives more grassroots support than mainstream media. We were left alone after one of the teachers at Arufu reported the news about the bump-off. It demonstrates the way the concerned folks feel. That was all, to the young man in Arufu, and that was breaking news. Their Facebook and WhatsApp platforms attract people to listen to what they are experiencing (Fieldwork, 2025). All these sentences depict the fact that the story is two-sided. The mainstream media was temporarily upsetting people due to the coverage, although it failed to sustain the pressure and press through. On the other hand, digital platforms become an advantage for advocacy and keeping track of things.

It is not good as it is an indicator of large governance and accountability challenges. The media portrays disasters as temporary, and thus, the leaders of governments and humanitarian organisations might realise that a crisis is a temporary event. This renders short-term assistance to appear superior to long-term recovery programmes. The use of social media by the survivors contributed greatly to making people accountable. However, according to the elder of the community, without social media, Wukari would have been forgotten entirely in the world. Citizen journalism is also so vulnerable. It is based on the connection between people, the extent to which they understand how to use technology, and how much they are willing to remain engaged despite their busy schedules.

Furthermore, exposures instigated by citizens do not necessarily translate into policies and resource allocation. As Table 2 demonstrates, utilizing the internet can help people stay in touch with their communities and be active in them. It also demonstrates that the shift in interest to long-term support was not initiated by the national media or humanitarian groups. Digital advocacy is significant, yet it can never substitute working with institutions on a day-to-day basis.

3.3 Community Responses, Coping, and Resilience Mechanisms, which are the post-crises

This section illustrates how community members addressed the Wukari situation, their perceptions of it, and how they emerged stronger. It discusses how the people affected came together to restore their lives, social relationships, and maintain the rehabilitation process. The table includes the key themes discussed in their stories, such as local initiatives, religious assistance, work with NGOs, and community cohesiveness.

Table 3. Community Responses, Coping Strategies, and Resilience Mechanisms After the Crises

Objective	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses from Participants	Interpretation / Implication
Gauge community responses, coping strategies, and resilience mechanisms after the crises	Grassroots initiatives	"Women started small cooperatives to support each other." (Female Entrepreneur, 48, Tsokundi).	Local initiatives helped communities cope and rebuild social ties.
	Religious solidarity	"Churches and mosques offered shelter and food." (Religious Leader, 53, Rafin-kada).	Faith-based groups provided crucial relief and emotional support.
	Partnerships with NGOs	"We partnered with NGOs to train women in tailoring and small businesses." (Civil Society Activist, 49, Wukari).	NGO partnerships supported skills training and reduced post-conflict tension.
	Community unity	"Our survival is based on unity. We realised government cannot do everything for us." (Community Leader, 52, Chonku).	Unity and self-reliance became key to resilience and social recovery.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

As indicated in Table 3, communities have made their best efforts to address the Wukari problems. This demonstrates their high levels of strength, which were flexible and grounded in their needs as well as those of the victims. New themes, grassroots efforts, religious solidarity, NGOs alliances, and a significant shift to self-reliance are depicted with the help of personal accounts given by the participants: women organising cooperatives (women started small cooperatives to support each other), religious institutions offering housing and food, and civil society organisations orchestrating job training (Fieldwork, 2025). All these responses combined prove that the recovery structure is bottom-up. This implies that social networks, churches, and NGOs are collaborating to fill the gap in government assistance.

Table 3 also illustrates that this local resilience has both positive and negative aspects. Social innovation provides people with strength. Women's cooperatives and faith-based aid are rapid ways to seek help, while skills programs run by NGOs help people avoid dependency. But this influence is not really strong; it mostly comes from donations from NGOs that are not regular, volunteer work, and the emotional work of religious leaders. People in communities believe that "We need to stick together to survive." "We realised that the government can't do everything for us," suggests that people are starting to accept that there is a limit to what the government can do. That is to say, community agency is crucial and needed, but private individuals should not be allowed so much power over recovery that they become permanent replacements for public welfare.

3.4 Community Empowerment Initiatives and Their Role in Reducing Poverty and Promoting Peace

This section explains how peace was restored in the community through empowerment initiatives that enhance the community's living standards and advance peaceful living through the self-help strategies they adopted. The table itemized the concerns of the people, including social fragmentation, high cost of living, and some self-help activities, such as digital advocacy and youth empowerment, to amplify voices and sustain their survival.

Table 4. Community Empowerment Initiatives and Their Role in Reducing Poverty and Promoting Peace

Objective	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses from Participants	Interpretation / Implication
Evaluate the potential of community empowerment initiatives in alleviating poverty and advancing sustainable peace	Economic empowerment	"My shop was destroyed, but rebuilding is slow." (Male, 41, Kente).	Economic recovery remains slow; people continue to struggle against poverty.
	High cost of living	"Before the crises, cement cost ₦1,500; now it is over ₦10,000. I have five children, and rebuilding my home feels impossible." (Male, 58, Chinkai).	Inflation and low-income limit recovery and make rebuilding difficult.
	Social fragmentation	"We now live in Strata's based on religious affiliation." (Female, 55, Jibu).	Social divisions deepen mistrust and threaten long-term peace.
	Digital advocacy	"We rely on Facebook to publicise our plight." (Male, 37, Arufu).	Digital activism is central to holding leaders accountable and amplifying voices.
	Self-help strategies	"I wash clothes for others to feed my children." (Female, 47, Bantaje).	Self-help activities sustain survival and empower individuals.
	Youth empowerment	"We send young men to learn trades to avoid being used in conflicts." (Male, 57, Wukari).	Youth training is vital to breaking cycles of violence and building peace.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

Table 4 examines empowerment initiatives that empower people to reduce poverty and promote peace. The outcomes are a mix, but mostly excellent. Respondents consistently identified empowerment efforts, including small-scale trading and vocational training for young people, as essential for recovery. Pragmatic survival strategies and intentional preventative measures are exemplified in remarks such as "We send young men to learn trades to avoid being used in conflicts" and "I wash clothes for others to feed my children" (Fieldwork, 2025). These instances demonstrate that restoring livelihoods and teaching new skills serve two purposes: they help individuals who are in serious financial trouble, and by providing alternative options to violent recruitment, they contribute to bringing about peace dividends.

4. Discussion

This research demonstrates that the consequences of the Wukari crises continue to have socio-economic impacts and remain ongoing. Along the lines of the first objective, respondents explained that the loss of farmland and businesses, as well as the decline of markets, contributed to families remaining in poverty. One farmer, for instance, said, "Before the crisis, I had three farmlands. Now, I cultivate only half an acre. Hunger has become normal in my household." A displaced person said, "I cannot go back to my land and farm because of the conflicts at the borders. We will have poverty without land to farm." It supports the arguments of Yuguda and Goni, as well as Deji and Shumo (2021), that ethnic rivalries in Wukari have shattered trust and social cohesion. Social Capital Theory posits that the primary function of economic recovery depends on the cooperative and supportive networks within the community. The absence of such potential cooperation means that the economic opportunities will not be restored.

The second and third objectives focused on examining the community response and the media coverage of the crisis. It has been shown that mainstream media intermittently reported

on the issue at hand; however, social media platforms were utilised by survivors as outlets to narrate their experiences. One teacher at Arufu described the media coverage as follows: "They reported the killings, but abandoned us afterward. It was just breaking news, and that was it." This finding is consistent with the observations by Dyikuk and Obateru (2021), who noted that, due to distance and a lack of active media, professional coverage was weak. However, in contrast to their conclusion that coverage was simply absent, this assessment highlighted the active role of communities in digital advocacy. As one young person noted, "Facebook and X campaigns by our people helped us call government attention." It illustrates that, despite traditional media being perceived as inadequate, citizen activism has emerged as a form of digital advocacy. In the absence of media coverage, community-sponsored relief and women's cooperatives promoted social capital, fostering grassroots initiatives that proved resilient during the crisis. This aligns with Suleimuri et al. (2021) but broadens the contribution to emphasize the role of both men and women in community-sponsored recovery and reconciliation initiatives in the Wukari Local Government Area.

Assessing how far empowerment initiatives can influence peace and poverty alleviation was the primary focus. Poverty remained despite self-help initiatives such as petty trade, tailoring, and animal rearing. A secondary school teacher lamented, "Before the crises, cement cost ₦1,500, now it is over ₦10,000. I couldn't sustain paying rent, we had to move to our old family house, living in a building that is almost collapsing." The testimonies suggest that community-driven empowerment initiatives can reduce tension, but they will not work in a vacuum. Igbashangev and Ogunyemi (2022) were correct in stating that the government needs to follow up on peace committees; however, this study would also add empowerment and resilience to work with community initiatives.

The findings illustrate the challenges and the considerable community engagement in their recovery. Survivors were not passive victims; they took on considerable agency in the reconstruction of social life and the local economy. Women's and youth faith-based groups mobilised and directed resources to establish skills training and microcredit programs for economically vulnerable families. Both the communities and the participants in the community initiatives developed self-efficacy, social cohesion, and sustained dialogue, which facilitated the identification and alleviation of tensions within and between the groups. The recovery model that embraced community participation empowered people to defend their agency. It enabled people to take ownership of their recovery and the revitalisation of their economy.

Embracing innovative measures to promote resilience and economic adjustment has also been reported. Several participants have explained how they use their mobile phones and social media not only to advocate but also to organise access to markets, spread information on crisis conditions, and connect displaced individuals to economic prospects. The cooperatives of some women were also facilitated with mobile payment facilities, and having digital savings, were able to streamline the financial management of the cooperatives. In contrast, youth groups utilized the internet to obtain remote vocational training. These digital innovations are being implemented despite the lack of infrastructural facilities, serving as evidence of the community's adaptability skills and its intention to introduce changes. The intertwining of digital innovations with conventional methods of survival reflects the instrumental role of digital innovations in restoring economic and social unity. The research findings are provided in the figure below.

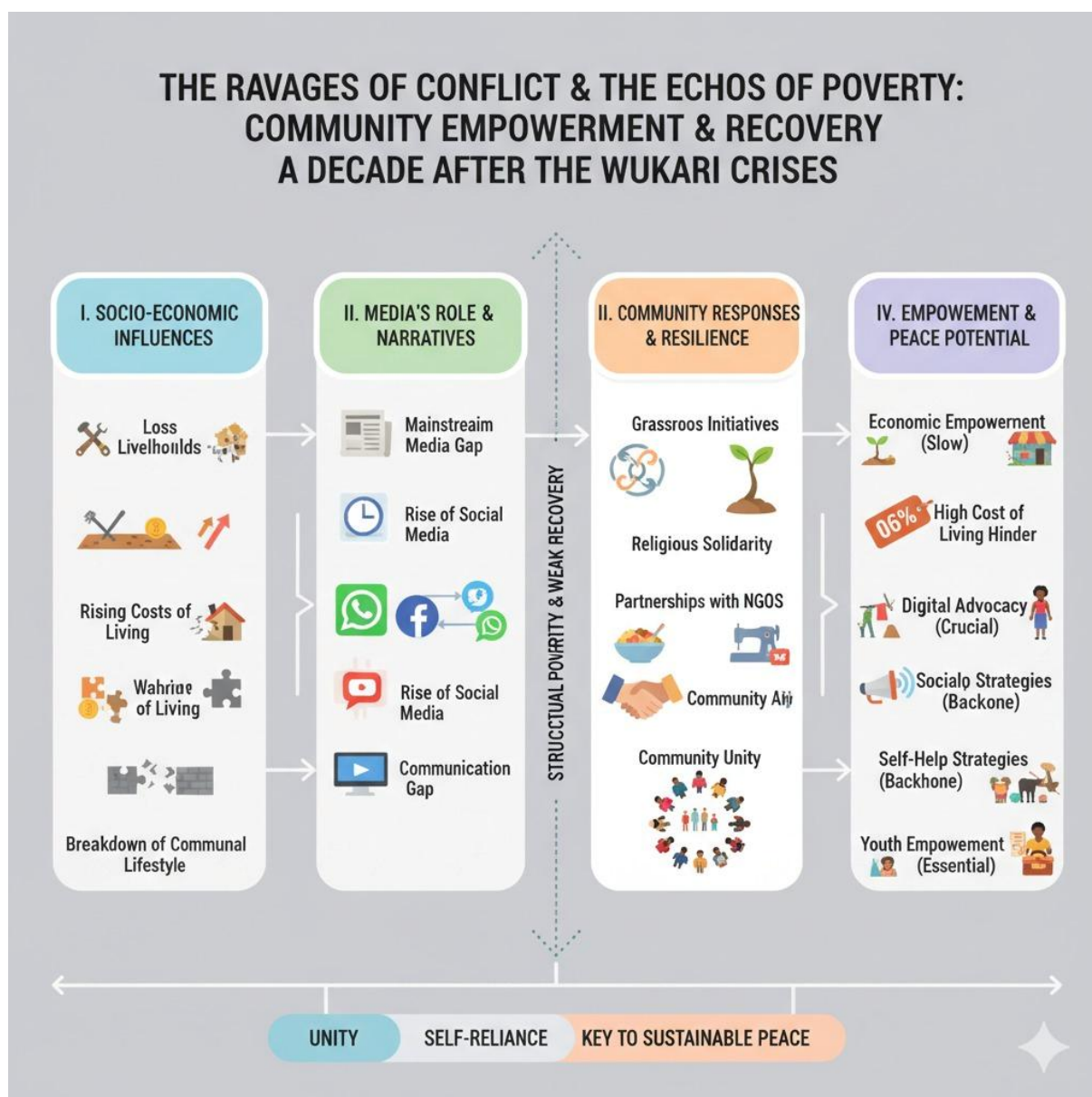


Figure 4. Graphic depiction illustrating the intricacies of socio-economic effects, media chronicles, community strength, and emancipation pathways in post-crisis Wukari
Source: Author's Compilation from Fieldwork.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Wukari crises led to social disunity, poverty, and distrust in relationships. The study's findings captured how these negative effects persisted with the people and still remain a decade after the crisis. Victims who were part of the interview sessions narrated their ordeal and how poverty still grips them. The inability of farmers to access farmlands and a teacher who was compelled to remain in his shuttered house captured the lived reality of the community. The media's effect was also paradoxical. While the national media's coverage of the events was feeble and erratic, the digital media, in contrast, provided a platform for the affected people to speak out and be heard. This not only reaffirmed the body of work on the media's minimal involvement but also highlighted the grassroots level of media self-organisation that provides the necessary activism. The social capital theory in the informal economic activities of faith groups, women's organisations, youth cooperatives, and other self-help associations is a testimony to the trust, social networks, and collective actions that communities employ to access and utilise resources for survival and recovery in times of crises. This and other studies indicate that Wukari's rebuilding entails as much social as it does

physical rebuilding, and that social cohesion and state organisational empowerment, alongside physical infrastructures rebuilding, are fundamental. Thus, this research highlights that full recovery and sustainable potential hinge on renewed trust, bolstered social and economic equitable empowerment of communities, and their integration into the respective systems.

Reconciliation efforts, such as interfaith harmony and discussion sessions, are key trust-building programs that form the basis of this study's recommendations. These initiatives should be prioritised by local leaders and the government at all levels. Furthermore, empowerment programmes that target vulnerable groups should reach a wider population, with their benefits felt by all. Initiatives such as skill acquisition and a capital lending programme should be made available, allowing youths and women to leverage them and become economically independent. The media, on their part, should rise above seasonal reporting of conflicts by collaborating with local journalists to maintain accurate records of conflict and recovery, keeping the public informed about the realities of post-conflict situations.

Additionally, the study shows that social media is an alternative means for the locals to share their plight and promote peace. Thus, communities should be encouraged to maximise the potential of these platforms. Hence, digital literacy should be established so that these digital platforms can be employed for recovery, peace, and developmental purposes. Still, government and development partners must invest in the revitalization of damaged social amenities, such as houses, hospitals, schools, markets, and recreation centers, and ensure that the recommendations of previous peace committees are adequately implemented. Hence, revitalisation must be practical and visible, beyond mere rhetoric.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest associated with this research. The study was conducted independently, without any financial, personal, or institutional influences that could have affected the objectivity, interpretation, or presentation of the findings. All data were collected and analysed solely for academic and developmental purposes. The researcher maintained full autonomy throughout the design, execution, and reporting of the study on post-conflict recovery and community empowerment in Wukari, Taraba State.

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