Crises Trajectory Issue Brief:

Stakeholders' Perspective on Intersecting Crises and Resilience in Benue State:

A Decade of Conflict, Displacement, and Response

by **development Research and Projects Centre**

in collaboration with the
National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies

Chronic Poverty Advisory Network — Getting to Zero

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List of **Abbreviations**

BASIC	Better Assistance in Crises Research
BICD	Benue State Bureau for International Cooperation and Development
BSEMA	Benue State Emergency Management Agency
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CPAN	Chronic Poverty Advisory Network
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEEP	Data and Evidence to End Extreme Poverty
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEEP	Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme
HGSFP	Home Grown School Feeding Programme
HND	Higher National Diploma
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KYC	Know Your Community (contextual)
MDA	Ministry, Department, Agency
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSc	Master of Science
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NiMeT	Nigerian Meteorological Agency
PGD	Postgraduate Diploma
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Acknowledgement

1.0 **Introduction**

Over the past decade, Benue State has emerged as one of Nigeria's most crisis-affected regions, grappling with overlapping challenges rooted in violent conflict and mass displacement despite efforts to address and mitigate them. The escalation of herder-farmer clashes, armed banditry, and broader insecurity has led to widespread destruction of lives and property, pushing tens of thousands into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. These crises have disrupted traditional and agrarian livelihoods, straining already fragile local governance structures, education systems, and access to essential services. While laws and policies are in place to address open grazing and enhance security, enforcement challenges have led to ongoing issues and a sense of impunity. This issue brief summarizes stakeholder consensus on the various crises dimensions within a broader historical and socio-political context: past, present, and anticipated crises, identifies preparedness and response options, and presents insights on proposed strategies for addressing intersecting crises, drawing on perspectives from Benue's civil society organizations (CSOs) and government agencies to inform resilient, forward-looking interventions.

2.0 **Methods**

The study employed the Delphi methodology; a structured communication technique designed to forecast and achieve expert consensus through iterative rounds of data collection. A diverse panel of experts, comprising government officials and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) in Benue State, participated in multiple focus group discussions (FGDs). The guiding questions addressed: (i) the most severe crises in the past five years (2020–2024); (ii) likely recurring and emerging crises in the next five years (2025–2030); (iii) gaps in past preparedness efforts; (iv) strategic actions to prevent future impoverishment and escalation; and (v) priority policy recommendations. Responses were anonymized and aggregated thematically or statistically after each round and shared with participants to allow for refinement of inputs based on group feedback, continuing until a predefined level of consensus was reached or a set number of rounds had been completed.

This data was gathered during a one-day consensus meeting of the Crisis Trajectory Mitigation Planning Technical Working Group in Abuja on April 28, 2025. The meeting was a follow-up to the previous four-part sessions held in their state. The final validation meeting was held on July 7, 2025, in a webinar organized by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS).

Fig: 1 Crises Trajectory Focus Group Discussions

Date: 10/03/2025	Date: 11/03/2025
Government Focus Group Discussion (10 Participants)	Civil Society Organization Focus Group Discussion (10 Participants)

Fig: 2 Crises Trajectory Findings Validation Meetings

Date: 13/03/2025	Date: 13/03/2025
Government Validation (10 Participants)	Civil Society Organization Validation (10 Participants)

28th April 2025

Consensus Crisis Trajectory Mitigation Planning Technical Working Group (10 Government And 5 Civil Society Organization Participants)

7th July 2025

A validation meeting was held with 36 participants, including government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), students, community representatives, academia, and development partners.

The research process was developed collaboratively through discussions within a broader mixed-methods research team, which refined the conceptual framework, focus areas, and methodological approach to ensure alignment with the complex crisis dynamics of Benue. This iterative development integrated qualitative impact assessments and timeline mapping to rank crises based on likelihood of exposure (estimated affected population and frequency) and severity of impact (scale of harm, including deaths, displacement, and systemic disruption). Crises were scored from 2020 to 2024 (Rank 1 = 7 points, Rank 2 = 6 points, ..., Rank 7 = 1 point) and summed over the period, with classifications informed by both government (Federal, State, and Local) and CSO perspectives (advocacy, rights-based, humanitarian, faith-based, human rights-focused, and service delivery/community-based). The crises ranking was derived from group consensus during the FGDs. The scope encompassed historical analysis (2020–2025) and forward-looking projections (2025–2030), ensuring a comprehensive understanding of past trends and future risks.

3.0 Definition of Key Concept

- **Crises:** Situations of severe disruption or instability that threaten the well-being, security, or survival of communities or populations, often involving multiple overlapping factors such as violence, displacement, and resource scarcity.

- **Ethnic Cleansing:** A deliberate and systematic policy aimed at forcibly removing an ethnic or religious group from a particular geographic area through violent and terror-inducing means such as murder, displacement, destruction of property, and other human rights abuses; it is recognized under international law as closely related to genocide and crimes against humanity.

- **Child Trafficking:** The illegal recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, or other forms of abuse, often exacerbated by displacement and the breakdown of protection systems.

- **Youth Crime:** Criminal acts committed by individuals typically classified as youths (often under 18 or 25 years old), which may include theft, violence, drug-related offenses, or gang involvement, frequently influenced by socio-economic factors and lack of opportunities.

- Organ Harvesting refers to the illegal and unethical practice of forcibly removing organs from individuals, often without their consent, for transplantation or sale on the black market.

- **Communal Clashes:** Violent conflicts between distinct communities, often defined by ethnic, religious, or cultural differences, triggered by competition over resources, political power, or historical grievances; these clashes are marked by mass mobilization, targeted violence, and breakdown of law and order.

- **Farmer-Herder Conflict:** A specific form of communal conflict arising from competition and disputes over land and water resources between sedentary farming communities and nomadic or semi-nomadic herders, often exacerbated by environmental pressures, demographic changes, and weak governance. "Matching Ground" refers to contested or shared land areas where competing groups, such as community youths, farmers, and herders, intersect and conflicts frequently occur.

- Illegal Mining involves unauthorized extraction of minerals, often leading to environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods for local communities, and sometimes fueling violent conflicts over control of mining sites.

- Identity-Based Violence is violence motivated by ethnic, religious, or cultural identity differences, often manifesting in communal clashes or ethnic cleansing.

- Loss of Livelihood occurs when conflicts, environmental degradation, or displacement disrupt traditional economic activities such as farming or herding, deepening poverty, and food insecurity.

- Banditry refers to armed robbery and criminal violence by organized groups, often overlapping with communal conflicts and contributing to insecurity in affected regions.

- IED stands for Improvised Explosive Device, a homemade bomb constructed and deployed in unconventional ways, often by insurgents, terrorists, or armed groups

4.0 **Results**

3.1 Key Crises with Greatest Negative Impacts Over the Last 5 Years (2020–2025)

Over the past five years, Benue State has endured a persistent series of crises that have inflicted profound social, economic, and environmental damage, undermining its role as Nigeria's agricultural heartland. Farmer-herder conflicts, fuelled by fierce competition over dwindling land and water resources, affected 20 out of 23 LGAs, particularly Guma, Kwande, and Agatu. The FGD participants estimated that over 80% of rural farmers reported loss of livelihood, destroyed farmlands critical to the state's economy, and deepened ethnic tensions between farming communities and pastoralists. Annual flooding, particularly in Makurdi, Buruku, and Gwer-West, intensified by climate change, has inundated vast swathes of arable land and displaced thousands. The 2022 floods alone affected over 100,000 people and caused losses estimated at billions of naira. Banditry and kidnapping have surged, targeting farmers and traders, disrupting markets, and eroding public safety. The Tiv and Idoma-speaking regions face higher exposure to herder attacks (because their fertile farmlands and water sources lie along key southern migration routes used by Fulani pastoralists escaping desertification, leading to frequent encroachment and crop destruction), while flooding disproportionately affects LGAs along the River Benue. Banditry is concentrated in border areas, exploiting weak security infrastructure.

Communal crises, often linked to land disputes, have fractured social cohesion. Additionally, cultism, child trafficking, and illegal mining have increased vulnerabilities, especially among youth and marginalized groups. These crises have not only disrupted livelihoods but also constrained government resources and eroded trust in institutions. Table 1 ranks these crises by likelihood of exposure (probability of occurrence) and severity of impact (human, economic, and infrastructural losses).

> "In the past five years, Benue has faced crisis upon crisis, farmer-herder conflicts, floods, and banditry. Our farmlands are destroyed, markets are unsafe, and over a million people are displaced. Each year, floods worsen, wiping out homes and crops. We now also see cultism, child trafficking, and illegal mining growing, especially among youth. These problems are interconnected, and they're stretching our institutions to the limit. People are losing trust in the government. It simply seems that the government lacks the capacity to respond adequately." (FGD participant, MDA, Benue State)

The interconnected nature of these crises has amplified their impacts, creating a vicious cycle of displacement, poverty, and insecurity. Farmer-herder conflicts, ranked as the most severe, have triggered mass displacement, forcing farmers to abandon fertile lands, which in turn has exacerbated food insecurity and fuelled communal clashes over diminishing resources. Flooding has compounded these challenges by rendering displaced populations even more vulnerable, as temporary shelters and IDP camps are often congested or overcrowded, leaving families without a safe refuge. Banditry and kidnapping, driven by economic desperation and weak security infrastructure, have discouraged investment and disrupted agricultural supply chains, further deepening poverty. Child trafficking and cultism, while less widespread, reflect the social fallout of these crises, with vulnerable youth falling prey to exploitation or recruitment into violent groups. Although lower in impact, illegal mining has caused environmental degradation, polluting water sources, and reducing the amount of arable land. Below is evidence of the crisis ranking from the study participants.

Table 1: Crisis Rankings (2020–2024 Combined CSOs and Government)

Crisis	Notes	Total Score	Frequency of Appearance	Likelihood of Exposure	Severity of Impact
Farmer-Herder Conflict	Ranked 1st or 2nd in all years it appeared	33	4 times	High	Very high
Flooding	Ranked consistently in the top 3	29	5 times	High	Ver High
Kidnapping/ Banditry	Often ranked 2nd or 3rd	24	5 times	Medium	High
Communal Crises	Mid-range crisis, rising over time	19	5 times	Medium	Medium
Child Trafficking/ Migration	Ranked lower but consistently included	15	5 times	Medium	Medium
Cultism/ Matching Ground	Mid-to-lower rankings throughout the years	14	5 times	Low	Medium
Mining	Consistently ranked last when included	5	4 times	Low	Low

Note: *Each crisis is assigned a score based on its rank in the years 2020 to 2024 (Rank 1 = 7 points, Rank 2 = 6 points, …, Rank 7 = 1 point). We then sum the scores over the five years. The crises were also ranked based on a qualitative assessment of the likelihood of exposure (estimated number of people affected and frequency) and severity of impact (scale of harm, including deaths, displacement, and systemic disruption). Each crisis is scored on a scale of 1–5 for both metrics (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High), and a combined score is used to rank them.*

Figure 1: Crises Heat Map by Likelihood and Severity (2020 – 2024 Combined CSOs and Government)

Source: Created from the FGD Dataset.
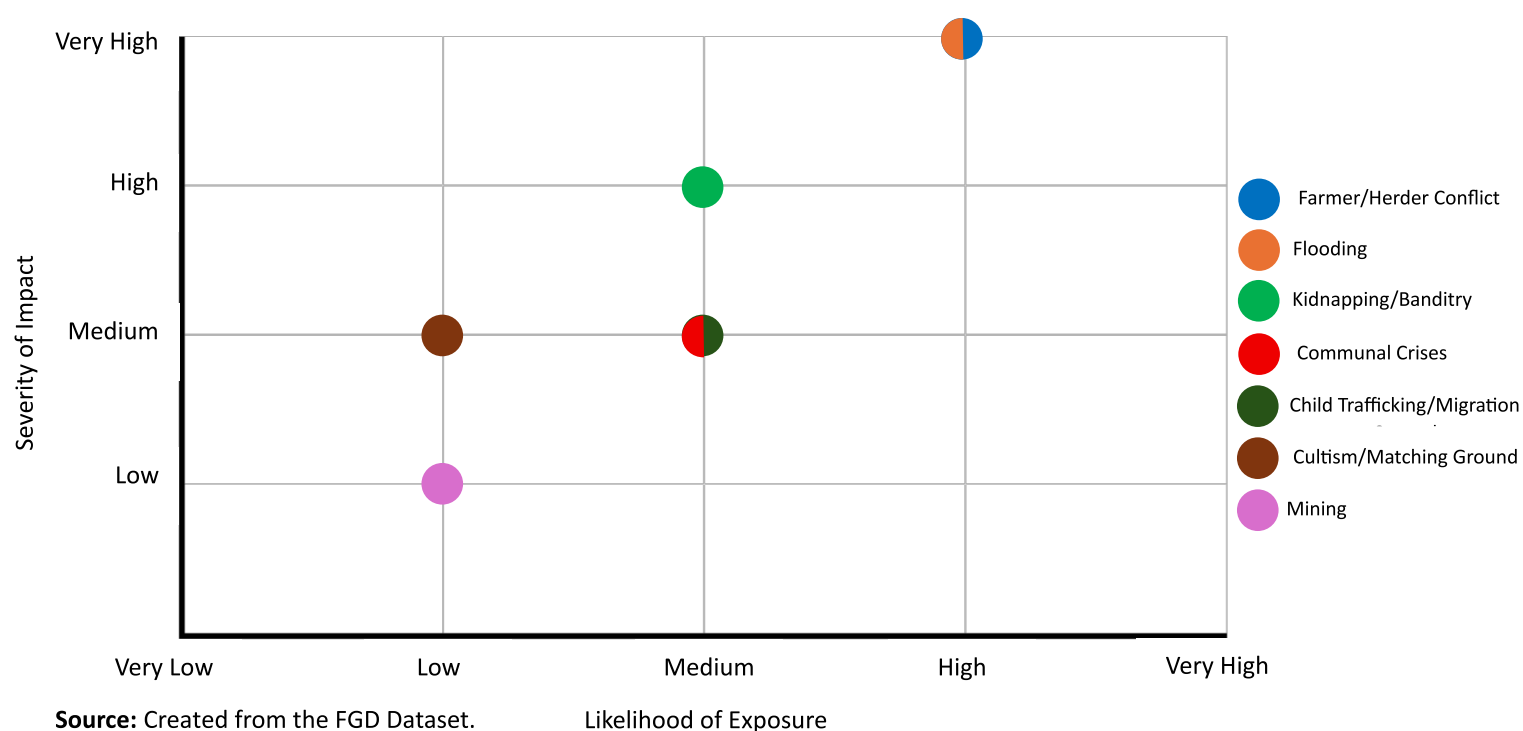
4.2 Expected Recurrent and New Crises (2025–2030)

Benue State's future crisis is shaped by both persistent threats from the last five years and a growing set of new and emerging vulnerabilities. Table 2 below offers further detail and justification on the high-level crises outlined in Table 1, expanding on the specific factors that make each threat enduring and complex.

Recurring crises such as farmer-herder conflicts, flooding, and displacement are expected to remain at the forefront through 2030. These threats, characterized by a high likelihood and severe impact, are now deeply embedded in the state's socio-political and environmental dynamics. The effects of flooding and violent conflict are particularly compounded, as displacement and resource loss intensify food insecurity, migration, and intergroup tensions. Mid-level risks like banditry and communal disputes also persist, while vulnerabilities like child trafficking, illegal mining, and youth crime remain on the radar due to their destabilizing potential. (Table 2).

Table 2: Crises Carried Over from the Past 5 Years

Crisis	Likelihood of Exposure	Severity of Impact	Occurrences
Farmer-Herder Crises	High	Severe	Continues to cause mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, deaths, and communal tensions.
Flooding	High	Severe	An annual event, increasingly destructive due to deforestation and poor infrastructure, which affects housing and agriculture.
Mass Displacement	High	High	Triggered by violence and flooding, disrupts education, livelihoods, and health systems.
Banditry	Medium	High	Expanding into new areas often intersects with other crises, such as displacement and cultism.
Communal Crises	Medium	Medium	Often triggered by land/resource competition, it leads to localized violence and instability.
Food Shortages/Loss of Livelihood	Medium	Medium	Tied to insecurity and flooding, land loss fuels poverty and migration.
Child Trafficking	Medium	Medium	Driven by displacement and poverty, it especially affects unprotected children in IDP settings.
Increased School Dropouts	Medium	Medium	Worsening due to displacement and poverty, the long-term effects on human capital are significant.
Youth crime/Cultism/ electoral offences	Low	Medium	A predominantly urban or peri-urban phenomenon among youth, contributing to local violence.
Ethnic Cleansing/ Identity-Based Violence	Low	High	Severe when it occurs, often with long-term effects on cohesion and trust.
Illegal Mining	Medium	Medium	Environmental degradation and local conflict risk are particularly prevalent in unregulated zones.

Note: *The crises are ranked based on a qualitative assessment of the likelihood of exposure (estimated number of people affected and frequency) and the severity of impact (scale of harm, including deaths, displacement, and systemic disruption). Each crisis is scored on a scale of 1–5 for both metrics (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High), and a combined score is used to rank them.*

Emerging trends such as land grabbing, cultural erosion, and organ harvesting are predicted to become more prominent between 2025 and 2030. These reflect broader shifts in climate, demography, and governance. Intensified competition over land and resources, combined with rising poverty, displacement, and weapon proliferation, signal a future in which existing crises may mutate or worsen. These trends are summarized in Table 3, which complements Table 2 by highlighting newer dynamics likely to intersect with longstanding vulnerabilities

Table 3: Newly Anticipated Crises (2025 and beyond)

New Crisis	Projected Likelihood	Projected Severity	Description
Intensified farmer-herder conflicts	Very High	High	Linked to displacement, conflict, resource control, and food insecurity
Increase in Out-of-School Children	High	High	Accelerated by displacement, poverty, and school closure
Rising Poverty	High	High	Exacerbates food insecurity, trafficking, and youth crime
Population Decline	Medium	Moderate	Driven by migration and insecurity in rural areas
Deforestation	Medium	Moderate	Linked to climate risk, loss of farmland, and environmental harm
Malnutrition/ Food Insecurity	Very High	Very High	Outcome of the food crisis: health system strain. Intersects with displacement, conflict, and environmental shocks
Loss of Identity/ Cultural Erosion	Medium	High	Tied to long-term displacement and breakdown of social fabric
Proliferation of Small Arms	High	High	Worsens cultism, banditry, and communal clashes
Acute Environmental Hazards (e.g., flash flooding)	High	High	Direct impact on lives, agriculture, and infrastructure
Crime Surge (Including election violence)	High	High	Linked to unemployment, displacement, and weapon access, political rivalry
Organ Harvesting	Medium	High	Link to poor livelihood and weak security

Note: *The crises are ranked based on a qualitative assessment of likelihood of exposure (estimated number of people affected and how frequently) and severity of impact (scale of harm, including deaths, displacement, and systemic disruption). Each crisis is scored on a scale of 1–5 for both metrics (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High), and a combined score is used to rank them.*

4.3 Key Intersecting Crises and Impacts

This section provides the main analytical depth for Section 3.2, focusing on how the simultaneous occurrence of different crises amplifies their individual impacts. While many intersections share outcomes such as displacement, poverty, and overcrowded settlements, each pairing has distinct primary consequences that must inform tailored response strategies.

Table 4: Intersecting Crises and Impacts

Intersecting Crises	Likelihood of Intersection	Severity of Impact	Examples	Key Impacts (Distinguishing Features)
Farmer-Herder Crises and Communal Crises	High	Severe	Ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders in Benue State are leading to communal tensions and violence.	More poverty, loss of population, and displacement.
Attacks by Herders and Mass Displacement	High	Severe	**April 2025:** Multiple herder attacks killing 23 in Ukum, Logo, and Guma LGAs, causing mass displacement[2]	Shortage of rural labour/erosion of rural economies; displacement triggers urban pressure.
Mass Displacement and Food Shortages	High	Severe	**July 2025:** Fears of food shortages rise as farming is disrupted by ongoing violence in Benue[3]	Lack of farming activities; farm abandonment leads to price shocks and hunger in IDP zones.
Communal Crises and Child Trafficking	Medium	High	Women paid N150,000 for each pregnancy at the IDP camp in North Bank and other parts of Makurdi.[4] 3 dead in Gwer and Oju Local Government Areas, LGAs[5]	Higher out-of-school children, disintegration of protection systems, and trafficking spikes post-conflict.
Ethnic Cleansing and Increased School Dropouts	Medium	High	June 2025: 200 people killed in the Yelewata community[6]	Schools converted to IDP camps, women/children-headed households; long-term education loss.
Abduction, displacement, and organ trafficking	Medium	Medium	In 2024, Several bodies were found on the streets of Markudi with body parts missing.[7]	Increase mortality and exploitation in unregulated spaces.

Note: *The crises are ranked based on a qualitative assessment of the likelihood of exposure (estimated number of people affected and frequency) and the severity of impact (scale of harm, including deaths, displacement, and systemic disruption). Each crisis is scored on a scale of 1–5 for both metrics (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High), and a combined score is used to rank them.*

As shown in Table 4, each intersection introduces unique drivers and outcomes. Future intersecting crises in Benue State, particularly the convergence of farmer-herder conflicts and communal crises, pose significant threats to stability and development. The competition over dwindling land and water resources drives farmer-herder conflicts, which often escalate into communal crises as ethnic and territorial disputes deepen divisions. This intersection is fuelled by weak governance, inadequate land-use policies, and climate-induced resource scarcity, exacerbating tensions between farming communities and migrating pastoralists. The likelihood of these crises intensifying is high, given the historical recurrence of violence and the limited mediation frameworks, which may be further exacerbated by population growth and environmental degradation. The impacts of these intersecting crises are profound, entrenching poverty as farmlands are destroyed or abandoned, forcing farmers to flee and disrupting livelihoods. Displacement surges, with rural population loss straining urban centres and host communities, leading to overcrowded settlements and resource competition. This fuels social tensions, weakens community cohesion, and risks further violence. Economically, destroying agricultural assets and disrupting markets deepens food insecurity and unemployment.

Additionally, the intersection of violent attacks by criminal herders and mass displacement in Benue State represents a critical crisis with far-reaching consequences. Persistent assaults on farming communities, driven by resource competition, ineffective judicial mechanisms that fail to deter perpetrators, and inadequate security measures, force thousands to flee their homes, resulting in widespread displacement. This intersection is highly likely to persist due to ongoing herder-farmer tensions, exacerbated by insufficient conflict resolution mechanisms and the proliferation of arms among criminal elements. As rural communities are uprooted, the ripple effects of these attacks disrupt the social and economic fabric of the state, intensifying vulnerability and instability. The impacts of this crisis are severe, with mass displacement leading to overpopulation in urban centres like Makurdi, where infrastructure such as housing, healthcare, and water systems are overwhelmed. This urban strain fuels poverty and social unrest, while rural areas face labour shortages, crippling Benue's agrarian economy and reducing food production. The resulting food insecurity and economic decline deepen poverty across both urban and rural populations.

"The continuous attacks by armed herders have devastated our rural communities. Entire villages are abandoned, and people flood into Makurdi and other towns, putting unbearable pressure on housing, clinics, and water supply. We're seeing rising poverty and tensions in the city, while our farms lie empty and food production drops. The justice system isn't deterring these attackers, and the security presence in rural areas is far too thin." (FGD participant, MDA, Benue).

Similarly, the intersection of mass displacement and food shortages in Benue State creates a dire crisis, as displacement from herder attacks and flooding severely disrupts agricultural production. In fertile regions like Guma and Agatu, where farming is the backbone of the economy, displaced communities are unable to cultivate crops, resulting in reduced harvests and food scarcity. This intersection is highly likely to persist due to ongoing conflicts, climate-related flooding, and limited resettlement efforts, which continue to destabilize rural agricultural communities and exacerbate food insecurity across the state. The impacts of this crisis are profound, with diminished food production driving up prices and worsening hunger, particularly in overcrowded internally displaced persons (IDP) camps where access to land and farming resources is scarce. The resulting food shortages strain local markets, deepen poverty, and increase malnutrition rates, especially among vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the intersection of communal crises and child trafficking in Benue State emerges as a critical issue, where instability from land and ethnic disputes creates fertile ground for exploitation. Communal conflicts drive displacement and poverty, leaving families vulnerable to traffickers who prey on children in chaotic environments. This intersection, while moderately likely due to existing social structures, carries severe consequences as trafficking networks exploit weakened community safety nets and economic desperation, particularly among displaced populations in volatile regions. Child trafficking and displacement mobility are deeply intertwined with the ongoing conflicts that have ravaged rural areas such as Guma, Gwer, Oju, Ukum, and Logo LGAs. These regions, heavily affected by farmer-herder violence and communal clashes, have seen large numbers of people forcibly uprooted from their homes, creating a significant pool of displaced persons vulnerable to

trafficking. Many of these displaced individuals, particularly women and children, are pushed towards IDP camps located in Makurdi, the state capital, and other urban centres, where the breakdown of social protection systems and insufficient security measures exacerbate their susceptibility to exploitation and trafficking. Moreover, the displacement does not remain confined within Benue's borders; it spills over into neighbouring states across Nigeria's Middle Belt, thereby amplifying the humanitarian crisis and spreading related security challenges across a wider geographic area. The impacts are devastating, with a surge in child trafficking leading to increased numbers of out-of-school children, as victims are either exploited or denied access to education. This disruption perpetuates cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and vulnerability, undermining the social fabric and future prospects of affected communities.

"What we are seeing is that every time there's a land or ethnic conflict, children suffer the most. Families displaced by communal clashes are left with nothing, and traffickers move in quickly, offering false promises. Many children are taken, some for labour, others for worse. The collapse of community safety nets makes it easier for these networks to operate. We've recorded a rise in out-of-school children, and many never return. This fuels long-term poverty and weakens our communities. If we don't strengthen child protection and community resilience, this crisis will keep growing." (FGD participant, MDA, Benue)

Furthermore, ethnic cleansing (the mass killing of members of the indigenous ethnic group by those of another) and increased school dropout in Benue State present a severe crisis, as violent herder attacks aimed at displacing indigenous communities disrupt education systems. Schools are often converted into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or abandoned due to insecurity, forcing children out of education. This intersection, while moderately likely due to sporadic but intense violence, carries profound social consequences, as it destabilizes communities and erodes educational access in regions already grappling with ethnic tensions and displacement. The impacts are far-reaching, with school closures and dropouts leading to fragmented families, often resulting in households headed by women and children. This disruption hampers human capital development, perpetuating poverty and vulnerability while increasing risks of exploitation and social instability.

Box 1: Divergences On Crises in Benue State

The Government of Benue State often attributes the multifaceted crises affecting the region to external influences and structural constraints. Farmer-herder conflicts, for instance, are framed as driven by Fulani expansion and inadequate federal support, while challenges in implementing the Anti-Open Grazing Law are attributed to logistical hurdles. Similarly, issues like IDP camp management, illegal mining, and emerging crises such as organ trafficking and cybercrime are viewed through the lens of resource limitations, jurisdictional boundaries, and national-level challenges. The government also tends to link persistent displacement, food insecurity, and flooding to external forces like security gaps, conflict effects, and natural disasters, emphasizing historical tensions as a root cause for communal crises and political violence. This perspective shows the complexity of addressing these issues within the constraints of federal oversight and limited local capacity.

In contrast, CSOs in Benue State emphasize internal systemic failures and localized vulnerabilities as the primary drivers of these crises. They argue that farmer-herder conflicts stem from internal factors, such as governance shortcomings, and that the Anti-Open Grazing Law suffers from inherent design flaws. CSOs point to accountability failures in IDP camp management, local corruption in illegal mining, and elite manipulation fueling communal crises and political violence. They also highlight systemic issues like poor planning for mass displacement, governance failures exacerbating food insecurity, and political inaction in addressing ethnic cleansing. Additionally, CSOs raise concerns about gender insensitivity in IDP camps, the criminalization of rural conflicts stifling meaningful dialogue, and the lack of rural infrastructure, which, combined with youth disinterest in agriculture and complicity with external criminal elements, perpetuates instability. This perspective highlights the necessity for localized accountability and structural reforms to address the underlying causes of these crises.

Finally, while both acknowledge food insecurity, the government links it to conflict spillovers.

4.4 Responses and Preparation Options for Recent Crises: CSOs vs MDAs

The intersecting crises in Benue State over the past five years (2020–2024) have exposed significant gaps in crisis preparedness and response. CSOs and the government have implemented various preparatory initiatives, but their effectiveness varies due to differences in agility, community engagement, and resource allocation. CSOs played a critical role in addressing complex and intersecting crises through targeted grassroots interventions. Their preparedness strategies are shaped by deep engagement with vulnerable communities, especially those affected by displacement, violence, and systemic neglect. Among the key intersecting crises identified by CSOs are the farmer-herder conflict combined with communal clashes, which have resulted in increased poverty, large-scale displacement, and loss of life. They also identified the intersection between communal crises and child trafficking that has exacerbated school dropout rates and heightened the vulnerability of children, especially girls, to exploitation, among other crises, as shown in Table 5. In response, CSOs have prioritized initiatives such as legal aid for IDPs, psychosocial support services, education reintegration for out-of-school children, and the empowerment of women and youth through vocational training and economic programs. Recognizing that insecurity is often fuelled by youth marginalization, CSOs have also emphasized the need to address cultism and banditry by investing in youth education, enforcing arms control measures, and promoting awareness of laws such as the Land Use Act. Their holistic approach spanning prevention, protection, and advocacy aims not only to mitigate immediate humanitarian impacts but also to build resilient communities capable of resisting future crises.

The government has also adopted a structured, policy-driven approach to crisis preparation, focusing on enforcement, humanitarian coordination, and social protection. It has employed a mix of legal reforms, peacebuilding mechanisms, and agricultural recovery programs aimed at addressing both the root causes and long-term effects of the crises. The government-enacted Anti-Open Grazing Law has remained a cornerstone strategy, supported by the deployment of security outfits, such as the Benue Civil Protection Guards, and the eventual establishment of regulated ranching systems. Social protection programs, such as GEEP, have been expanded by the government to build pre-crisis resilience and offer immediate relief during emergencies through cash transfers. The government supports agricultural recovery through the provision of seeds and equipment via FADAMA and similar projects. Meanwhile, community peace structures, such as the Peace and Reconciliation Committees, promote local dialogue and long-term stability. The government's coordination mechanisms with agencies like BSEMA and international partners, such as the International Organization for Migration, have been crucial for IDP camp management and resettlement planning. Table 5 highlights these responses.

Phase	CSO Preparation and Response Options	CSO Gaps	Government (MDA) Preparation and Response Options	Government (MDA) Challenges
Before Crises (Anticipatory)	• Early warning systems via community-based monitoring networks (e.g., land disputes, herder movements). • Train local leaders in conflict mediation. • Use digital platforms for real-time reporting. • Expand BICD with predictive analytics.	• Limited access to real-time data in rural areas. • Weak CSO-government integration. • Political resistance or mistrust of CSO roles.	• Community policing and surveillance systems. • Consistent enforcement of anti-open-grazing laws. • Promote climate-resilient agriculture.	• Inadequate security/surveillance funding. • Political resistance to the grazing law. • Slow uptake of climate-smart agriculture.
During Crises (Absorptive)	• Preposition relief materials for rapid distribution. • Coordinate with volunteers in IDP camps. • Provide trauma counselling, child protection services.	• Logistical barriers in crisis zones. • Insecurity is limiting responder mobility. • Resources strained by high demand.	• Relief delivery via BSEMA with decentralized warehouses. • Support displaced farmers with tools and seeds.	• Poor infrastructure and access. • Procurement and delivery delays. • Inter-agency coordination issues.
After Crises (Adaptive)	• Livelihood programs and school reintegration. • Catch-up classes with school partnerships. • Advocacy for land-use policy enforcement.	• Insufficient long-term funding. • Sustaining community participation is hard. • Weak enforcement of land policies.	• Expand social programs (GEEP, NPower, CCT, HGSFP) with vocational and credit components. • Expand renewed hop intervention such as the 3Million Technical Talents Scheme, Skill-Up Artisans Programme (SUPA) and National Youth Talent Export Programme (NATEP • Launch resettlement with housing and land access.	• Bureaucratic delays. • Land conflicts hinder resettlement. • Weak M&E for long-term outcomes.

Despite these efforts, gaps remained. CSOs often lacked funding, predictive tools, or specialized networks to address emerging threats like child trafficking and climate-induced flooding. Government MDAs, while more institutionally equipped, were hindered by slow policy implementation, logistical challenges in relief delivery, and insufficient resettlement planning. By 2024, responses had evolved to include more systemic approaches such as durable solution plans, resettlement strategies, and institutionalized peace efforts (e.g., the Peace Commission). However, the persistent preparation gaps, particularly the limited capacity of CSOs for sustained funding and the urban planning deficits of MDAs, highlight the ongoing mismatch between crisis severity and institutional readiness. While both sectors improved coordination and diversified their interventions over time, the visual timeline underscores a pattern of reactive responses to predictable threats. Moving forward, integrating anticipatory measures like early warning systems, conflict-sensitive urban planning, and investment in long-term livelihoods will be essential to shift from short-term mitigation to long-term resilience.

"If you go out right now, you'll see cows grazing openly despite the existing ban and the laws in place. This shows a lack of enforcement. If the government is truly sincere, it must ensure that the justice system is upheld. There needs to be strong political will to enforce laws and ensure that no individual is above the institutions we have in this country. If we genuinely commit to this principle, it could go a long way in addressing many of our problems." (FGD participant, CSO, Benue)

Table 6 illustrates the timeline of crises and ranked initiatives (2020–2024) for Benue State, detailing key crises, and ranking CSO and Government MDA initiatives, and preparation gaps for each year.

Table 6: Crises and Ranked Initiatives (2020–2024) and Gaps

Year	Key Crises	CSO Initiatives (Ranked 1-7)	MDA Initiatives (Ranked 1-7)	Preparation Gaps
2020	Farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, early displacement	1. BSEMA coordination 2. IDP camp support. 3. Relief materials. 4. Community dialogues. Advocacy for peace. 6. Child protection programs 7. Livelihood support	1. Formation of Benue Volunteer Guard. 2. Anti-open grazing law drafting. 3. BSEMA relief efforts. 4. Security patrols 5. IDP camp establishment 6. Social protection (GEEP, NPower, CCT, HGSFP). 7. Infrastructure repairs	CSOs: Lacked predictive tools. MDAs: Delayed grazing law enforcement.
2021	Intensified herder attacks, mass displacement, food shortages	1.Anti-grazing law advocacy. 2. Security coordination. 3. IDP camp aid. 4. Relief materials/food items/nutrition counselling 5. BSEMA support. 6. Community guards 7.Entrepreneurship training	1. Benue Volunteer Guard expansion. 2. Anti-open grazing law enforcement. 3. IDP camp expansion. 4. Security operations. 5. BSEMA logistics. 6. Social protection. 7. Relief distribution	CSOs: Needed better funding. MDAs: Faced logistical bottlenecks in relief delivery, Inadequate preparation.
2022	Communal crises, child trafficking risks, school dropouts	1. IDP camp support. 2. Security advocacy. 3. Relief materials. 4. Community sensitization and Shelter provisions. 5. BSEMA collaboration. 6.Anti-grazing law monitoring. 7. Communal guards	1. Open grazing law enforcement. 2. Benue Civil Protection Guard establishment. 3. Social protection programs 4. IDP camp management. 5. Security enhancements. 6. BSEMA operations. 7. Relief efforts	CSOs: Weak anti-trafficking networks. MDAs: Had weak school protection measures, Underfunded, Limited reach
2023	Flooding, food shortages, ethnic cleansing	1. Security coordination. 2. Relief materials. 3. Shelter provisions. 4. BSEMA support. 5.Entrepreneurship programs. 6. Sexual assault centre advocacy/Established referral pathways for human rights 7. Peacebuilding workshops	1.Benue Civil Protection Guard operations. 2.Social protection expansion. 3.Anti-open grazing law enforcement. 4. IDP camp upgrades. 5. BSEMA flood response. 6. Security deployments. 7. Relief distribution	CSOs: Needed flood early warning systems. MDAs: Delayed resettlement programs/ poor camp management
2024	Persistent displacement, food insecurity, trafficking risks	1. Peace commission. 2. BICD programs. 3. Durable solution plans. 4. Security advocacy. 5. BSEMA collaboration. 6. Relief materials. 7. IDP camp support	1. Anti-open grazing law enforcement. 2.Social protection programs 3. Benue Civil Protection Guard. 4. IDP camp management. 5. BSEMA operations. 6. Security enhancements. 7. Resettlement planning	CSOs: Require sustained funding. MDAs: Need better urban planning, funding and political will

Box 2: Policy Learning and Missed Opportunities in Benue State

In Benue State, policy implementation and crisis response have revealed critical lessons and missed opportunities that continue to shape the region's ability to address recurring and intersecting crises effectively. The enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition Bill, while a step toward regulating resource conflicts, lacked adequate stakeholder sensitization, leading to resistance and weak enforcement, which exacerbated farmer-herder tensions. Collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs, such as IOM, UNHCR, and NEMA, significantly improved humanitarian responses by enhancing aid distribution and coordination through tools like IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) for IDP profiling and camp management. However, the neglect of livelihood recovery programs, the absence of robust early warning systems, and the underutilization of peace and reconciliation mechanisms worsened crises, leaving communities vulnerable to displacement, food shortages, and insecurity. Key lessons learned include the necessity of enforcement capacity to support laws, the critical role of community engagement in conflict resolution, and the need for sustained, coordinated humanitarian responses. The failure to establish functional ranches, underutilization of data for policy-making, inconsistent political commitment, and limited investment in resilience-building further highlight missed opportunities, compounded by a lack of stakeholder engagement, political divisions, and insufficient federal-state-local government collaboration, all of which hindered effective crisis management.

Data has proven indispensable in addressing Benue's crises, with IOM's DTM exposing the scale of displacement and informing targeted interventions, such as livelihood programs, transit shelter construction, and health outreach, including the MOU between Benue-SEMA and Benue State Teaching Hospital following MSF's exit. Verified displacement data strengthened advocacy for federal intervention, donor support, and budgetary allocations, enabling better planning and informed decision-making to meet affected populations' needs. However, the lack of dialogue among contending parties and the absence of accurate, evidence-based data in past responses often led to mismatched strategies, as ground realities differed from assumptions. This underscores the vital role of data in future planning, alongside the need to overcome barriers like insincere stakeholder motives driven by personal interests and the lack of know-your-community (KYC) approaches to understand local dynamics.

4.5 Forward-Looking Crises Intersections and Response Options for Benue State

Benue State stands at the confluence of multiple crises, farmer-herder conflicts, flooding, and youth crime, whose compounded impacts threaten agricultural livelihoods, food security, and social stability. Stakeholder analyses suggest the need to shift from a long list of parallel interventions to integrated, cross-cutting strategies focused on prevention, absorptive relief, and long-term adaptation. Table 7 presents a consolidated framework for addressing the two major structural stressors, insecurity and flooding, across three stages of resilience building.

Table 7: Strategic Options to Address Structural Crises in Benue State

Resilience Phase	Addressing Structural Challenges Related to Insecurity	Addressing Structural Challenges Related to Flooding
Before Crises (Anticipatory)	• Strengthen early warning systems linked to peace committees (BICD). • Train traditional and youth leaders as local mediators. • Map high-risk conflict zones to pre-empt displacement.	• Operationalize Benue-SEMA command-and-control centre. • Install community-level flood alert systems. • Enforce land-use planning and protect wetlands.
During Crises (Absorptive)	• Expand trauma-informed services in IDP camps. • Deploy Benue Civil Protection Guards to deter rural violence. • Distribute seeds, tools, and emergency food in conflict-hit zones.	• Stockpile flood relief materials at decentralized warehouses. • Provide mobile health clinics and temporary shelters. • Strengthen emergency logistics with NEMA partnerships.
After Crises (Adaptive)	• Institutionalize secure land access and resettlement. • Invest in vocational hubs and youth mentorship schemes. • Scale up inclusive justice and mediation mechanisms.	• Build flood-resilient housing and drainage systems. • Promote climate-smart agriculture and dry-season farming. • Expand social protection (GEEP, NPower, CCT) in high-risk zones.

Key Integrated Response Priorities at the Crisis Intersection
The intersection of insurgency (farmer-herder conflicts) and flooding is particularly destabilizing for Benue's most vulnerable. These overlapping crises result in repeated displacement, urban overcrowding, and the erosion of youth opportunity, creating conditions ripe for crime, trauma, and deepening poverty. Stakeholders emphasize three forward-looking, cross-cutting priorities:

1. Early Action through Integrated Monitoring and Preparedness
CSOs and MDAs must collaborate to establish integrated early warning and response systems. These systems should track both conflict-related triggers, such as herder migration patterns and rising communal tensions, as well as environmental risk indicators, including rainfall intensity and river levels. The linking of monitoring tools to existing structures such as the BICD peace platforms and the Benue-SEMA command centre would enable faster, coordinated responses to emerging humanitarian and security threats. Also, early response mechanisms must be activated promptly to match early warnings, ensuring communities receive timely protection and support. Public education and awareness campaigns, especially in local languages, should convey both conflict and disaster preparedness messages in a unified and accessible manner.

2 Holistic Emergency Response and Relief Coordination
Current absorptive mechanisms often operate in silos. Flood and conflict victims require joint relief logistics, ranging from trauma counseling and food aid to rapid shelter and farm recovery. Multi-agency task forces involving CSOs, MDAs, and traditional institutions should lead coordinated responses in hotspots like Guma, Agatu, and Makurdi. Emphasis should be placed on community-based trauma care, as repeated shocks are leaving deep psychosocial scars, especially among youth and women.

3. Youth Engagement as a Stabilization and Adaptation Strategy
Recurrent crises have heightened the risk of youth recruitment into violent crime and cultism. The most durable intervention lies in economic reintegration, vocational training, and leadership inclusion. CSOs can scale up vocational hubs, adolescent clubs, and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), while MDAs embed skills training into adaptive social programs. These must include land access and safe spaces for youth in resettled communities to prevent criminal relapse or migration.

4. Overhauling Security Governance and Local Mediation Mechanisms

The current security response is often reactive and fragmented. A proactive, inclusive security framework must be developed, one that aligns federal, state, and local roles in a well-coordinated structure. This includes retraining police and civil protection personnel for early intervention and community-based policing, strengthening local peace committees, and embedding gender-sensitive protocols within IDP management. Multi-level security coordination forums and real-time information-sharing mechanisms should be institutionalized to rebuild community trust and enhance timely response to both conflict and disaster risks.

5. Investing in Governance, Infrastructure, and Data-Driven Resilience

Sustainable crisis response depends on strengthening governance systems and rural infrastructure. The government must prioritize political accountability, inclusive planning, and transparency to restore public trust. Infrastructure investments, particularly in roads, bridges, water systems, and drainage, will improve access to services and enhance emergency response capabilities. The use of data tools such as the flood vulnerability map should guide planning and resource allocation. A citizen-wide approach that integrates gender equity, local knowledge, and evidence-based decision-making will be essential to building long-term resilience.

Box 3: Learnings from the validation webinar meeting with multisectoral stakeholders

Recent banditry in Benue State, Nigeria, notably the June 13, 2025, Yelewata attack, resulted in over 100 civilian deaths, with some estimates reaching 200. Armed assailants, suspected to be Fulani herders, employed sophisticated weaponry, including automatic rifles, targeting the predominantly farming community in Guma Local Government Area. The attack involved arson, destroying homes, grain reserves, and infrastructure like boreholes and clinics. This incident exacerbated the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Benue State. This incident occurred outside the Crisis Trajectory research period, but it formed the basis for validating the preliminary research findings. The Benue State Crises Trajectory validation meeting (July 7, 2025), convened by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in collaboration with the development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC), and supported by the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex's Chronic Poverty Advisory Network (CPAN) engaged a multi-sectoral stakeholder to examine and validate the findings from the research. The webinar addressed the escalating crises in Benue State, Nigeria, including farmer-herder conflicts, flooding, kidnapping, banditry, communal clashes, and emerging issues like organ harvesting. Stakeholders validated the study's highlight of the severity and likelihood of these crises, noting their impact on displacement, food insecurity, and education disruption. Key recommendations from the validation meeting included: (1) reforming security architecture with enhanced intelligence and tactical deployments for prevention of future crisis; (2) leveraging geospatial conflict vulnerability mapping; (3) strengthening local governance for early warning systems; (4) promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration fostering synergy among federal, state, and local levels, integrating traditional rulers and civil society; (5) ensuring accountability to tackle impunity and politicization to restore trust and effective governance, prioritizing citizen-centric security approaches; and (6) deploying socioeconomic interventions like social protection programs, rural development, and trauma healing to mitigate poverty and displacement.

5.0 Conclusion

Benue State stands at a critical crossroads, confronting a convergence of prolonged and emerging crises that require a coordinated, anticipatory, and multi-sectoral response. The data demonstrate how singular events such as flooding or communal violence often intersect with structural vulnerabilities like poverty, displacement, and ineffective land governance, compounding their human, economic, and social costs. As these intersections intensify, so too does the need for preparedness systems that are proactive rather than reactive. Strengthening early warning mechanisms, investing in preventive infrastructure, and embedding conflict sensitivity into development planning are essential first steps. Moreover, tackling root causes such as land tenure insecurity, environmental degradation, and youth unemployment requires long-term, adaptive interventions that go beyond humanitarian relief to build resilience and restore trust in institutions. Equally important is the alignment of CSOs and government responses. CSOs bring agility, local legitimacy, and community networks that are vital for real-time monitoring and grassroots mediation, while MDAs possess the policy instruments, funding capacity, and enforcement powers needed for systemic change. Their collaboration must be deepened through shared intelligence platforms, joint planning, and integrated funding pipelines. Looking ahead, Benue must transition from crisis containment to crisis transformation, turning recurring vulnerabilities into opportunities for inclusive development.

Annex

Respondents' Demography and Profile

Among the ten CSO respondents in Benue State, two-thirds were female (66.7%) and one-third were male (33.3%). The age distribution was fairly even across generations, with 16.7% aged 30–40, 33.3% aged 41–50, another 33.3% aged 51–60, and 16.7% aged 61 years or older. Educational attainment was evenly split, with 50% holding a BSc or HND and 50% holding a PGD or MSc. All respondents were based in Benue State. Regarding experience, 33.3% had 1–5 years of experience in the civil society sector, 16.7% had 6–10 years, another 16.7% had 11–15 years, and 33.3% had over 21 years of experience. In terms of roles, half were Executive Directors, while the remainder included Field Workers, Legal Officers, and Project Officers (16.7% each). In comparison, the ten government respondents were predominantly male (85.7%), with only one female (14.3%). A majority (57.1%) were aged 41–50, with the rest evenly distributed across other age groups (14.3% each). Educational qualifications showed 42.9% for both BSc/HND and PGD/MSc, and 14.3% held a PhD. All were also based in Benue. Experience levels were fairly distributed, with 28.6% in the 6–10, 16–20, and over 21-year brackets, and 14.3% in the 11–15-year range, reflecting a strong representation of senior-level public service professionals.

Current Roles and Designations of FGD Participants

FGD participants represented a diverse range of roles across both government and civil society sectors. In the public service, the positions included Assistant Director, Deputy Director of Agricultural Engineering (on secondment as Operations Manager), Director of Planning, General Manager, Head of Administration, Environmental Safeguards Specialist, and a Senior Reporter covering local government affairs, with each accounting for 14.3% of the respondents. In civil society, the leadership and operational roles were equally varied, with 50% serving as Executive Directors. In contrast, others held positions such as Field Worker, Legal Officer, and Project Officer, each accounting for 16.7% of participants.

MDA Affiliation and Type of Organization

FGD participants were drawn from various MDAs, as well as a range of CSOs. Among public sector respondents, affiliations included the Benue State Community and Social Development Agency (reported twice under slightly different names), Benue State Emergency Management Agency, Social Investment Programme Agency/National Orientation Agency, Ministry of Women Affairs, the Environmental Unit of the Fadama Coordination Office, and the Bureau of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, each representing 14.3% of participants. On the CSO side, the organizational types represented were diverse: advocacy, rights-based, and humanitarian (16.7%), faith-based (16.7%), legal and human rights-focused (16.7%), and service delivery/humanitarian/community-based (16.7%). Additionally, community-based organizations, noted under various spellings, constituted a notable 33.3%.

Key Areas of Policy and Programmatic Focus

FGD participants represented a broad spectrum of policy and programmatic focus areas, reflecting both government and civil society priorities. In the public sector, key areas included disaster management and social welfare, education on government policies, planning (with an emphasis on strategic direction, social welfare, and environmental/social management), and the implementation of social protection programs, each cited by 14.3% of respondents. From the CSO perspective, participants highlighted diverse thematic areas, including civic education, governance, empowerment, the promotion of the rights of women, children, and

vulnerable groups, as well as multi-sectoral issues such as health, education, gender-based violence (GBV), livelihoods, youth engagement, peacebuilding, environmental protection, and agriculture. Each of these focus areas was mentioned by 16.7% of CSO respondents, underscoring the sector's broad commitment to addressing interconnected social challenges.

Levels of Policy Influence and Geographical Coverage

FGD participants from government institutions indicated varying degrees of policy influence, reflecting roles that span across different governance levels. While two respondents (28.6%) affirmed having policy influence without specifying the level, others clearly outlined their engagement at the local and state levels (14.3%), local and state with federal collaboration (14.3%), national level (14.3%), and across state and national levels (14.3%), with one noting involvement at all three levels: local, state, and national (14.3%). On the other hand, CSO participants reported diverse geographical reach within and beyond Benue State. Their operational footprints ranged from limited coverage, such as working in five or six LGAs, to broader scopes encompassing all 23 LGAs, the entire state, and even extending to the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). This variation highlights both localized interventions and broader policy engagement across the participant landscape.