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COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY INITIATIVES AND RECOVERY IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED NORTH-EAST NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND LOCAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE

[1]Obike Hilary N., [2]Iwegbulam Emeka
[1]Department of Political Science, Abia State University
[2]Rhema University
Email: [1]hilaryobike@yahoo.com, [2]emekaiwegbulam@rocketmail.com

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency remains a major security and humanitarian challenge in North-East Nigeria, with prolonged violence affecting civilian protection, livelihoods, social cohesion, and local governance. Against this backdrop, community-based security initiatives (CBSIs) have become important actors in local security governance and post-conflict recovery. This study examines the contributions of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), traditional institutions, faith-based organizations, women's associations, youth groups, and civil society organizations to community resilience and sustainable peace in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. Adopting a qualitative case study design, the study draws on documentary analysis of [Eight core empirical documents] documents published between 2013 and 2026, comprising Nigerian government policy documents, reports of international organizations, peer-reviewed scholarship, and civil society publications. Anchored in Local Ownership Theory and Security Governance Theory, the analysis suggests that CBSIs play important complementary roles in intelligence gathering, civilian protection, conflict mediation, and community resilience, while their effectiveness is constrained by weak institutional regulation, inadequate funding, accountability concerns, human rights allegations, and limited coordination with formal security agencies. The findings are interpreted as documented patterns within the documentary evidence rather than as estimates of causal effects. The study argues that sustainable security governance requires clear institutional mandates, accountability safeguards, transparent financing, legal oversight, and structured coordination between community-based actors and formal security institutions.

Keywords: community-based security initiatives; Boko Haram; security governance; local ownership; peacebuilding; North-East Nigeria; sustainable peace

Introduction

Since its emergence in 2009, Boko Haram has evolved from a localized extremist movement into one of Africa's most violent insurgent organizations. The conflict has resulted in widespread destruction across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, displacing over two million people, and destroying critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, markets, and public institutions (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; Amnesty International, 2023). Although military operations conducted by the Nigerian Armed Forces, supported by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), have recovered significant territories previously controlled by insurgents, military victories alone have not translated into sustainable peace (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Recovery in conflict-affected settings requires more than degrading insurgent organizations; it demands rebuilding governance institutions, restoring public confidence, promoting reconciliation, and strengthening local capacities capable of preventing renewed violence (Mac Ginty, 2021). Consequently, increasing scholarly attention has shifted toward understanding how communities themselves contribute to peacebuilding and security governance after prolonged armed conflict.

Across North-East Nigeria, communities developed innovative responses to persistent insecurity. Rather than relying exclusively on state institutions, citizens organized community-based security initiatives (CBSIs), including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), traditional rulers, religious leaders, women's organizations, youth associations, and local civil society groups. These actors provide intelligence, monitor suspicious movements, mediate communal disputes, support humanitarian interventions, facilitate the reintegration of former insurgents, and contribute significantly to rebuilding social cohesion (Hassan & Pieri, 2018). The emergence of CBSIs reflects broader patterns observed across fragile states where formal security institutions possess limited capacity to provide comprehensive security. Rather than replacing the state, these actors often complement governmental efforts by utilizing local knowledge, social legitimacy, and community trust unavailable to formal security agencies (Baker & Scheye, 2007). Community security has therefore become increasingly recognized as an essential pillar of contemporary peacebuilding strategies.

Despite their growing importance, scholarly debates remain divided regarding the long-term implications of CBSIs. While many studies highlight their effectiveness in intelligence gathering and civilian protection, others emphasize concerns relating to accountability, human rights abuses, politicization, inadequate regulation, and sustainability (Ashindorbe et al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2022). This divergence identifies the central problem addressed by this study: formal security institutions lack the local embeddedness required for effective counter-insurgency, yet the community actors who supply that embeddedness operate largely without the legal regulation, professional oversight, and accountability mechanisms that govern formal security provision. Resolving this problem requires systematic evidence on the conditions under which community security initiatives strengthen security governance, and the point at which their involvement begins to generate accountability and legitimacy costs.

The existence of CBSIs in North-East Nigeria is well documented in the literature; what remains insufficiently understood is the variation in their performance, legitimacy, and accountability across communities and actor types. The knowledge gap addressed by this study is therefore not whether CBSIs exist, or whether they are useful in general, but the more precise question of under what conditions, through what mechanisms, and with what accountability safeguards community-based security initiatives contribute to sustainable security governance and when their involvement instead produces exclusion, abuse, or fragmented authority.

Accordingly, this article investigates the contribution of community-based security initiatives to recovery and local security governance in conflict-affected North-East Nigeria. Specifically, it addresses two research questions:

1. Under what conditions and through what mechanisms have community-based security initiatives contributed to community resilience and local security governance in North-East Nigeria?

2. What institutional and accountability challenges limit their effectiveness, and what safeguards are necessary for their sustainable integration into formal security governance?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the expanding literature on hybrid security governance in three ways. First, it shifts the analytical focus from whether CBSIs matter to the conditions, mechanisms, and safeguards that explain variation in their contribution. Second, it engages Local Ownership Theory and Security Governance Theory not merely as supportive

frameworks but as theories whose expectations the empirical evidence confirms, modifies, and in part challenges. Third, it provides practical, evidence-proportionate recommendations for integrating community security initiatives into Nigeria's broader security architecture.

Literature Review

Hybrid Security Governance and the "Local Turn"

Traditional state-centric approaches to security assume that governments maintain an exclusive monopoly over the legitimate use of force. However, prolonged conflicts frequently weaken state institutions and create governance gaps that are filled, in practice, by local actors (Richmond, 2005). Security Governance Theory argues that security provision increasingly involves multiple actors operating simultaneously within complex governance networks comprising governments, communities, traditional authorities, civil society organizations, private security providers, and international agencies (Baker & Scheye, 2007). Rather than viewing these actors as competitors, the theory emphasizes their complementary roles in promoting human security. Similarly, Local Ownership Theory argues that sustainable peace is more likely when local communities actively participate in designing, implementing, and sustaining peacebuilding initiatives (Donais, 2021). International interventions frequently fail because externally imposed institutions lack local legitimacy and do not reflect indigenous governance structures.

Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) describe this broad reorientation as the "local turn" in peacebuilding, emphasizing that everyday practices of conflict resolution, community dialogue, traditional justice, and social cooperation frequently prove more sustainable than externally designed interventions. Within the Nigerian context, these perspectives explain why communities developed indigenous security responses despite continued military operations. Community members possess contextual knowledge unavailable to formal security institutions, including local social networks, cultural norms, family relationships, and geographical familiarity, making them potentially indispensable partners in intelligence gathering and conflict prevention (Hassan & Pieri, 2018).

The Embeddedness Advantage and Its Duality

Across the reviewed literature, the principal comparative advantage of CBSIs appears to be their embeddedness within local social networks. The Civilian Joint Task Force, established in Maiduguri

in 2013 at the height of Boko Haram's territorial expansion, became an indispensable intelligence partner for the Nigerian military precisely because members could identify insurgent collaborators, hideouts, and supply routes invisible to conventional forces (Hassan & Pieri, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2019). Traditional rulers mediate land and inheritance disputes arising from displacement, facilitate the reintegration of displaced populations, and coordinate communication between communities and government agencies. Faith-based organizations counter extremist narratives, provide psychosocial support to victims of violence, and promote interfaith dialogue, drawing on moral authority that shapes public attitudes toward peace, forgiveness, and reintegration (Forest, 2012). Women's organizations contribute intelligence gathered through access to domestic spaces, markets, and informal networks, and support the reintegration of abducted women and children (Ashindorbe et al., 2021). Youth groups conduct neighborhood surveillance and early warning, while civil society organizations promote human rights education, document abuses, advocate security sector reform, and strengthen accountability mechanisms (CLEEN Foundation, 2022).

However, this embeddedness produces a dual effect. The same characteristics that make CBSIs effective — local knowledge, informal authority, and community embeddedness — also raise concerns about partiality, arbitrary exercise of informal authority, profiling of particular ethnic or religious groups, and weak accountability (Ashindorbe et al., 2021). The literature therefore converges on a critical insight: embeddedness is simultaneously the source of CBSIs' effectiveness and of their most serious risks. This duality, rather than the activities of any single actor, is the central analytical problem in the field.

Operationalizing Community-Based Security Initiatives

The term "community-based security initiatives" requires an operational definition because the manuscript's subject category spans actors with very different mandates, resources, forms of authority, and relationships with the state. For the purposes of this study, a CBSI is defined as a non-state, community-embedded actor that performs security-related functions — such as intelligence gathering, civilian protection, conflict mediation, early warning, or violence prevention — and that draws its authority primarily from local legitimacy rather than statutory mandate, while interacting with, rather than replacing, formal security institutions.

Three criteria justify treating these diverse actors as one analytical category. First, they share a functional criterion: each performs security-governance functions that complement state provision in the context of state incapacity. Second, they share a legitimacy criterion: their authority derives from community recognition rather than legal delegation. Third, they share a relational criterion: all operate in structured interaction with formal security agencies, whether through cooperation, co-optation, or tension. The study nonetheless recognizes that these actors differ substantially in mandate and mechanism; the analysis therefore treats them as a single category at the level of function while distinguishing their specific contributions and risks where the evidence requires it.

The Effectiveness Accountability Dilemma

A substantial body of scholarship documents the effectiveness of CBSIs in intelligence gathering, civilian protection, and community resilience (Hassan & Pieri, 2018; CLEEN Foundation, 2022; UNDP, 2023). A parallel body documents accountability problems, including allegations of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial conduct, and profiling involving some CJTF members (Amnesty International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022), alongside concerns about politicization, inadequate regulation, and uncertain post-conflict sustainability (International Crisis Group, 2019; Ashindorbe et al., 2021). These two literatures are rarely brought into direct conversation. This study addresses that gap by examining effectiveness and accountability not as separate questions but as dimensions of a single dilemma generated by the duality of embeddedness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Local Ownership Theory and Security Governance Theory. Because the two theories are sometimes used interchangeably in the peacebuilding literature, it is necessary to specify precisely what each explains, where they overlap, whether they generate different expectations, and how the empirical findings engage them.

Local Ownership Theory explains variation in the legitimacy and durability of peacebuilding arrangements. It predicts that security and recovery initiatives succeed to the extent that local communities participate in designing, implementing, and evaluating them, and that externally imposed arrangements lacking community acceptance will generate only temporary stability (Donais, 2021; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Its analytical focus is motivational and micro-level:

trust, acceptance, and the sustainability of locally anchored institutions. Security Governance Theory, by contrast, explains the structural configuration of security provision. It predicts that in fragile and conflict-affected settings, security will be supplied by plural providers state agencies, community organizations, traditional authorities, religious institutions, and international actors and that outcomes depend on how these providers are coordinated (Baker & Scheye, 2007).

The theories overlap in rejecting the Weberian assumption of an exclusive state monopoly over security, and both predict complementarity between state and community actors. They diverge, however, in their vulnerability. Local Ownership Theory carries an implicit optimism about "the local" that leaves it less equipped to predict coordination failures or abuses committed by locally legitimate actors; Security Governance Theory can explain coordination problems and fragmented authority but is less attentive to the legitimacy differentials that determine whether particular providers are trusted and obeyed. The two theories therefore generate complementary but distinct expectations: Local Ownership Theory expects community-anchored initiatives to enjoy durable legitimacy; Security Governance Theory expects hybrid arrangements to exhibit persistent coordination and accountability difficulties.

As the findings demonstrate, the evidence from North-East Nigeria confirms both theories while modifying each. The documented complementarity between CBSIs and formal security agencies supports both frameworks; however, the coexistence of local ownership with exclusion, profiling, and abuse modifies Local Ownership Theory's optimism, while the fragmentation of accountability within hybrid arrangements confirms and extends Security Governance Theory. Figure 1 presents the resulting conceptual framework, in which CBSIs, conditioned by institutional regulation and accountability safeguards, contribute through community intelligence, conflict mediation, early warning, civilian protection, and humanitarian support to improved local security governance, recovery, and, ultimately, sustainable peace.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Boko Haram insurgency

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Collapse of local security provision

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Community-Based Security Initiatives

(CJTF • Traditional Institutions • Faith-Based Organizations • Women's Groups • Youth Associations • Civil Society)

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Community Intelligence • Conflict Mediation • Early Warning • Civilian Protection • Humanitarian Support

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Improved Local Security Governance

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Recovery in Conflict-Affected Communities

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Sustainable Peace

Source: Author's conceptual framework (2026).

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design to examine the contribution of community-based security initiatives to recovery in conflict-affected North-East Nigeria. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of complex governance relationships, community experiences, and institutional dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through

quantitative methods (Yin, 2023). The study focuses primarily on Borno State, which has experienced the highest intensity of Boko Haram violence and possesses the most developed network of community-based security initiatives. Evidence from Adamawa and Yobe States is incorporated where relevant to enhance comparative understanding and to avoid unwarranted generalization from the Borno case.

Study Area

The study area comprises the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, specifically Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States (Figure 2). These states have experienced the highest concentration of Boko Haram attacks, internal displacement, humanitarian crises, and military operations since the onset of the insurgency in 2009. Borno State serves as the primary case because it has consistently recorded the highest incidence of insurgent violence and hosts the largest concentration of community-based security initiatives, including the Civilian Joint Task Force.

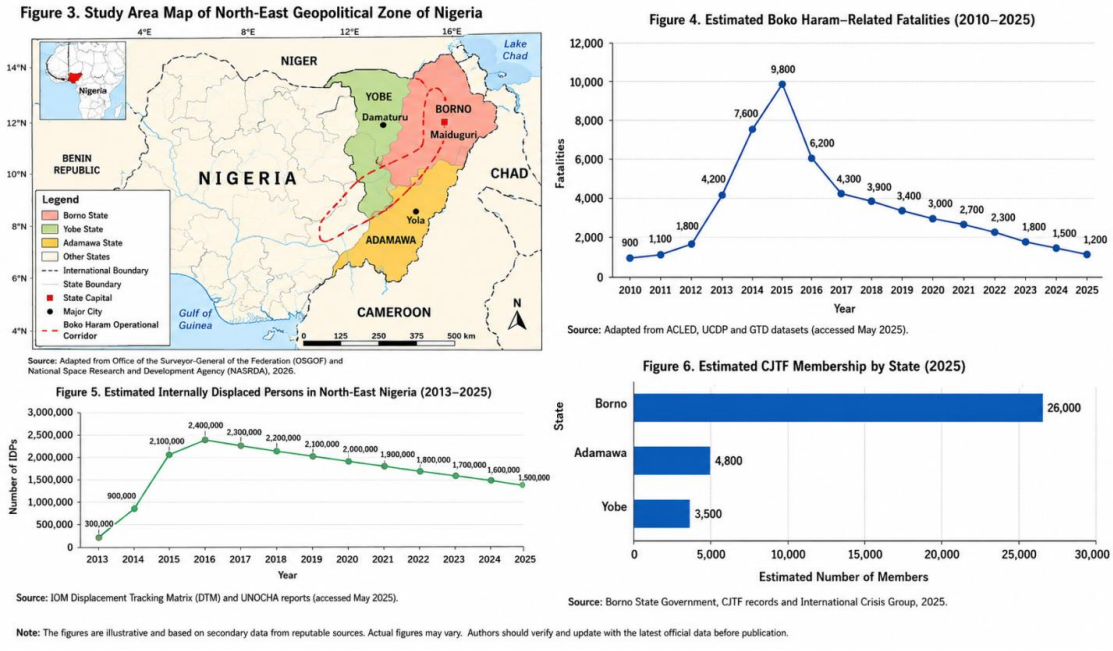


Figure 2. Study area showing the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States)

Source: Adapted from the Office of the Surveyor-General of the Federation (OSGOF) and the National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), with author's modification (2026).

Document Identification and Selection

Documents published between 2013 and 2026 were searched across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar and the official websites of relevant government, intergovernmental, and civil society institutions, using combinations of the terms "Civilian Joint Task Force," "community security," "Boko Haram," "North-East Nigeria," "hybrid security governance," and "peacebuilding." Documents were included when they directly examined community security, local governance, peacebuilding, or civilian protection in Borno, Adamawa, or Yobe States; were published in English; and were produced by government bodies, international organizations, peer-reviewed outlets, or established civil society organizations. Opinion pieces, unattributed media reports, and documents not directly addressing community security governance were excluded. The final corpus comprised [XX] documents: [X] Nigerian government policy documents and security strategies, [X] reports of international organizations (including UNDP, UNOCHA, and the International Crisis Group), [X] peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, and [X] reports of civil society organizations (including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the CLEEN Foundation). The authors should verify that this description accurately reflects the search and selection procedures actually undertaken and adjust the corpus description accordingly.

Analytical Procedure

The documents were analysed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework. In the familiarization phase, each document was read in full and annotated. In the coding phase, initial codes were generated inductively from the text; illustrative codes included "CJTF checkpoint intelligence," "detention and profiling allegations," "women's market and domestic networks," "mediation of land disputes," and "irregular funding and welfare." Codes were then collated into candidate themes, reviewed against the full data set and the study objectives, defined and named, and reported. The analysis produced five final themes: (1) community intelligence and early warning; (2) civilian protection and community policing; (3) conflict mediation and reconciliation; (4) humanitarian support, resilience, and reintegration; and (5) institutional challenges and accountability. Credibility and analytical reliability were enhanced through triangulation across the four source categories, the maintenance of an audit trail linking

themes to source documents, and reflexive note-taking during analysis. The study relies exclusively on secondary data and therefore involves no human participants and required no ethical approval.

Findings

Overview of Community-Based Security Initiatives

Table 1 summarizes the major community-based security initiatives operating in North-East Nigeria, their primary functions, their documented contributions, and the key challenges each faces. The table illustrates both the functional diversity within the CBSI category and the shared constraints weak regulation, funding inadequacy, and accountability gaps that cut across actor types.

Table 1: Major Community-Based Security Initiatives in North-East Nigeria

Initiative	Primary Functions	Major Contributions	Key Challenges
Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	Intelligence, patrols, checkpoints	Counter-insurgency support	Human rights concerns, inadequate funding
Traditional Institutions	Mediation, dispute resolution	Community reconciliation	Declining authority in some communities
Faith-Based Organizations	Counter-radicalization, trauma counseling	Social cohesion	Limited institutional resources
Women's Associations	Intelligence gathering, humanitarian assistance	Reintegration and early warning	Underrepresentation in decision-making
Youth Groups	Community patrols, neighborhood surveillance	Community resilience	Limited government support, livelihood vulnerability
Civil Society Organizations	Human rights monitoring, advocacy	Accountability and governance reforms	Donor dependency

Source: Compiled by the author from Hassan and Pieri (2018), CLEEN Foundation (2022), UNDP (2023), and Human Rights Watch (2022).

Intelligence Gathering

Documentary evidence indicates that intelligence collection is one of the most significant contributions of CBSIs. Community members possess intimate knowledge of local social networks, geographical terrain, and behavioural patterns that enable them to identify suspicious activities before formal security agencies become aware of emerging threats (Hassan & Pieri, 2018). The CJTF has enhanced military operations by identifying Boko Haram collaborators, locating insurgent hideouts, and facilitating the rescue of abducted civilians, and military commanders have repeatedly acknowledged the operational value of local intelligence (International Crisis Group, 2019). Women's and youth networks extend this capacity into domestic, market, and neighborhood spaces that conventional surveillance rarely reaches (Ashindorbe et al., 2021). These findings are associations documented across multiple source categories rather than quantitatively estimated effects; the study makes no causal claims beyond what the documentary evidence supports.

Community Resilience and Social Cohesion

Documentary sources suggest that CBSIs have contributed to community resilience through neighborhood patrols, market security, humanitarian support, and the protection of returning internally displaced persons, helping to restore public confidence and encourage gradual socioeconomic recovery (CLEEN Foundation, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Traditional institutions have mediated land disputes arising from displacement, while women's organizations have supported the reintegration of abducted women and children. Faith-based organizations have provided psychosocial counselling, trauma healing, and interfaith dialogue programmes that promote reconciliation among previously divided communities (Forest, 2012). These activities are consistently reported across the corpus as strengthening social cohesion, although the evidence does not permit measurement of their aggregate effect on the incidence of renewed violence.

Conflict Mediation and Reconciliation

CBSIs have contributed to local conflict resolution through mechanisms that remain widely respected among local populations. Traditional rulers resolve disputes involving land ownership, inheritance, and community leadership through customary institutions, while religious leaders facilitate reconciliation between former insurgents, victims, and affected communities by promoting forgiveness, restorative justice, and peaceful coexistence (Forest, 2012; Hassan & Pieri, 2018). Such

interventions complement formal judicial processes while reducing pressure on overstretched legal institutions.

The Effectiveness–Accountability Tension

A balanced assessment requires examining whether the same characteristics that make the CJTF effective also generate risk. The available evidence suggests that they do. Reports by Amnesty International (2023) and Human Rights Watch (2022) document allegations of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and profiling of individuals suspected sometimes on the basis of community denunciation — of insurgent affiliation. Because CJTF authority rests on informal community recognition rather than legal delegation, members exercise coercive power with limited due-process constraints, creating opportunities for personal vendettas, political capture by local elites, and the exclusion of marginalized groups from protection (Ashindorbe et al., 2021). The same embeddedness that provides superior intelligence thereby also weakens the procedural safeguards that surround formal security provision. This tension is not incidental to community security governance; it is its defining dilemma, and it directly informs the theoretical discussion below.

Participation, Decision-Making Power, and Inclusion

The findings on women's and youth participation must be stated with precision. Documentary sources establish that women contribute to intelligence gathering, humanitarian assistance, reintegration support, and early warning, and that they remain underrepresented in decision-making structures (Ashindorbe et al., 2021). These are, however, distinct claims: participation in security functions does not equate to decision-making power, and neither guarantees leadership authority. Recognizing women's contributions therefore does not, by itself, establish inclusive security governance; inclusion requires structural presence in the coordination and oversight bodies that set CBSI priorities. Similarly, youth should not be treated primarily as a source of surveillance labour. Their documented socioeconomic vulnerability, limited employment alternatives, and exposure to recruitment by armed actors mean that durable community security depends on livelihood, education, and post-conflict transition opportunities for young volunteers, not only on their mobilization (UNDP, 2023).

Institutional Challenges

Several structural challenges continue to undermine CBSI effectiveness. First, inadequate legal regulation creates uncertainty regarding operational authority and accountability. Second, irregular funding limits operational effectiveness and contributes to poor welfare among community volunteers. Third, the allegations described above have damaged public confidence in some localities (Amnesty International, 2023). Fourth, coordination between community actors and formal security institutions remains inconsistent in the absence of standardized operational procedures and intelligence-sharing mechanisms (International Crisis Group, 2019). Table 2 summarizes the documented contributions of CBSIs alongside the specific documentary evidence supporting each, replacing unverified effect claims with source-attributable findings.

Table 2: Documented Contributions of Community-Based Security Initiatives to Peacebuilding

Security Function	Documented Contribution	Documentary Evidence
Intelligence gathering	Improved counter-insurgency operations	CJTF identification of collaborators and hideouts; acknowledged operational value of local intelligence (Hassan & Pieri, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2019)
Community policing	Enhanced civilian protection	Neighborhood patrols and checkpoints in Maiduguri and environs (CLEEN Foundation, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022)
Conflict mediation	Strengthened reconciliation	Traditional resolution of land and inheritance disputes; interfaith dialogue programmes (Forest, 2012)
Humanitarian assistance	Improved community resilience	Support to returning IDPs; psychosocial counselling; reintegration of abducted women and children (UNDP, 2023)
Early warning	Prevention of attacks	Women's and youth networks reporting suspicious activities through market and neighborhood channels (Ashindorbe et al., 2021)
Social cohesion	Increased public trust	Improved state–community cooperation in counter-insurgency operations (Mac Ginty, 2021; Ashindorbe et al., 2021)

Source: Author's synthesis of documentary evidence (2026).

Discussion

CBSIs and Local Security Governance

The findings indicate that CBSIs have become an institutionalized layer of local security governance in North-East Nigeria rather than a temporary wartime expedient. This aligns with Security Governance Theory's prediction that plural providers fill gaps left by weakened state institutions (Baker & Scheye, 2007), but it extends that literature by showing that the form of hybridity matters: where coordination mechanisms with formal agencies exist, complementarity predominates; where they are absent, the same actors operate as unaccountable local powers. This finding is consistent with Higazi's (2023) account of the CJTF's evolution from spontaneous vigilante group to semi-institutionalized security partner, and it suggests that the durability of hybrid arrangements depends less on the actors themselves than on the institutional channels linking them to the state.

Community Security and Sustainable Peace

The documented contributions of CBSIs to resilience, reconciliation, and reintegration support the core claim of the local turn: everyday, community-anchored practices are central to sustainable peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2021). At the same time, the persistence of attacks in the region demonstrates that community security cannot substitute for the resolution of structural drivers — marginalization, weak service delivery, and livelihood collapse — that sustain recruitment into violent extremism (UNDP, 2023). Sustainable peace in this setting is therefore best understood as an interaction between community capacity and structural reform, not as the product of either alone.

Effectiveness, Legitimacy, and Human Rights

The effectiveness–accountability tension documented in Section 5.5 speaks directly to the unresolved tension in the peacebuilding literature between the romance and the reality of the local. The evidence that local ownership can coexist with arbitrary detention and profiling modifies the optimistic reading of Local Ownership Theory and confirms warnings that informal security providers may reproduce the abuses of the state actors they complement (Amnesty International, 2023; Ashindorbe et al., 2021). Legitimacy, in other words, is not self-executing: community authorization of coercive power does not displace the need for due process, oversight, and human rights compliance. This is the study's most consequential finding for both theory and policy.

Implications for Hybrid Security Governance

Read jointly, the two theories and the empirical evidence yield a conditional conclusion: hybrid security governance works when community embeddedness is coupled with institutional safeguards, and fragments into unaccountable authority when it is not. This confirms Security Governance Theory's emphasis on coordination while specifying the content that coordination must have legal mandate, oversight, funding regularity, and rights-based training and it reframes Local Ownership Theory's prescription from "include the local" to "include the local, under conditions." The study thereby answers its guiding question: CBSIs contribute to sustainable security governance under the conditions of institutionalized collaboration, resourced professionalism, and enforced accountability.

Policy Implications

The findings indicate that community-based security initiatives have become an important layer of hybrid security governance in North-East Nigeria, and that their continued effectiveness depends on comprehensive institutional reform rather than ad hoc reliance on community volunteers. Because the evidence is documentary rather than causal, the recommendations are deliberately proportionate: they call for assessment, institutionalization, and safeguard-building rather than presuming that any single legislative instrument is the optimal solution.

First, regarding the legal framework, the Federal Government should assess existing Nigerian legislation, policies, and institutional arrangements governing community security including the constitutional provisions on policing, the Police Act, and existing state-level vigilante laws and identify precisely what legal gap remains. Where gaps persist, a comprehensive framework should define the mandates, accountability, oversight mechanisms, and operational limits of CBSIs. New legislation should be justified by demonstrated need, not assumed.

Second, institutional integration should prioritize accountability, transparency, and human rights. Independent oversight mechanisms capable of investigating allegations of misconduct would improve public confidence while reducing opportunities for abuse, and mandatory training in civilian protection, conflict management, gender sensitivity, and international humanitarian law should apply to all community security personnel.

Third, international development partners should recognize community security initiatives as legitimate peacebuilding stakeholders. Rather than focusing exclusively on military assistance, donor interventions should invest in local governance institutions, community policing programmes, trauma healing, youth empowerment, women's participation in leadership and oversight structures, and social cohesion initiatives that address the structural drivers of violent extremism.

Table 3: Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Community Security Governance

Challenge	Policy Response	Expected Outcome
Weak legal framework	Assess existing legal and policy instruments; where gaps remain, establish a comprehensive framework defining mandates, accountability, oversight, and operational limits	Institutional legitimacy and accountability
Human rights abuses	Mandatory human rights training and independent oversight	Improved civilian protection
Poor coordination	Joint operational centres and intelligence-sharing mechanisms	Better security collaboration
Inadequate funding	Sustainable federal and state funding mechanisms	Improved operational effectiveness
Gender exclusion	Increase women's participation in leadership and intelligence structures	Inclusive security governance
Weak post-conflict planning	Reintegration and livelihood programmes for volunteers	Sustainable peacebuilding

Source: Author's recommendations (2026).

Figure 3. Integrated Community Security Governance Model

Federal Government

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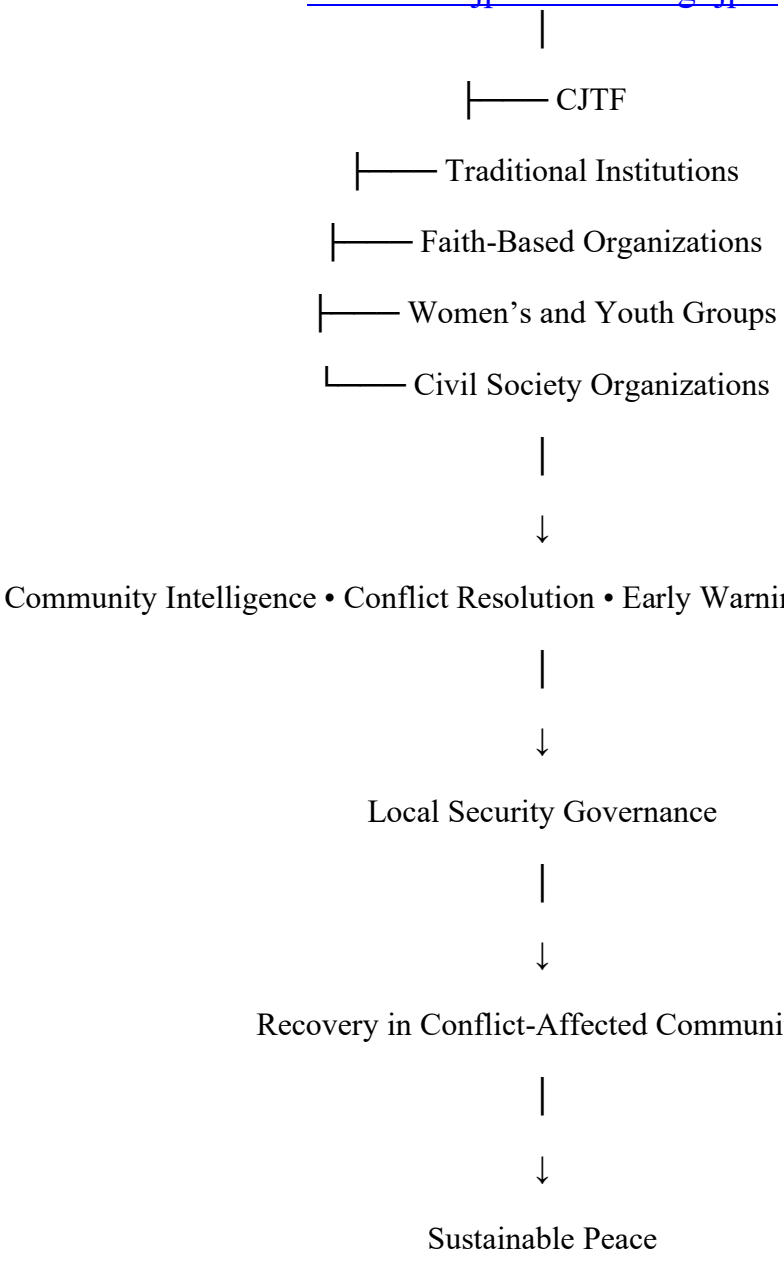
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Security Agencies (Military • Police • DSS)

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Joint Coordination Mechanisms



Source: Developed by the author (2026).

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that qualify its findings. First, it relies exclusively on secondary documentary sources; it does not draw on interviews, focus groups, or survey data from affected communities. Second, documentary sources particularly those produced by governments, security agencies, and advocacy organizations may reflect institutional or political biases, and the findings

may reproduce those biases despite triangulation. Third, the analysis identifies documented associations and cannot establish causal effects; claims that CBSIs "reduced" insecurity or "strengthened" reconciliation exceed what the design can demonstrate and have been moderated accordingly. Fourth, community-level perceptions of CBSIs cannot be directly assessed from documentary data, and such perceptions may diverge considerably from the assessments of external observers. Fifth, experiences vary considerably between communities and states, and findings from Borno State the primary case should not automatically be generalized to Adamawa, Yobe, or other conflict-affected regions. Sixth, the reliance on English-language documents may exclude locally produced knowledge in Hausa, Kanuri, and other regional languages. Future research should therefore undertake longitudinal field studies involving community leaders, former insurgents, security personnel, women, youth organizations, and internally displaced persons, and comparative studies across other conflict-affected African countries would further enrich understanding of hybrid security governance.

Conclusion

This study examined the contribution of community-based security initiatives to recovery and sustainable local security governance in conflict-affected North-East Nigeria. The analysis demonstrates that durable peace cannot be achieved solely through kinetic operations; it requires rebuilding social trust, strengthening community resilience, restoring governance institutions, and promoting inclusive participation in security management. The findings indicate that the Civilian Joint Task Force, traditional institutions, faith-based organizations, women's associations, youth groups, and civil society organizations have contributed to intelligence gathering, community policing, conflict mediation, humanitarian assistance, reconciliation, and public confidence in local governance, complementing state security institutions with locally grounded knowledge and social legitimacy.

Equally, the study shows that these contributions are inseparable from serious institutional weaknesses: inadequate legal recognition, inconsistent funding, poor coordination with formal security agencies, allegations of human rights violations, limited inclusion of women in decision-making, uncertain livelihood futures for youth volunteers, and the absence of comprehensive transition strategies. The same embeddedness that makes CBSIs effective also enables arbitrary

detention, profiling, and political capture. The appropriate response is neither rejection nor uncritical institutionalization, but conditional integration: community participation secured through legal mandate, sustainable financing, professional training, independent oversight, and structured collaboration with formal security agencies.

Theoretically, the study advances scholarship on hybrid security governance by demonstrating that Local Ownership Theory and Security Governance Theory are complementary but insufficient on their own: the former must absorb the possibility that local ownership coexists with exclusion and abuse, and the latter must specify the institutional content not merely the fact of coordination. The central question for research and policy is therefore not whether community-based security initiatives matter, but under what conditions, through what mechanisms, and with what accountability safeguards they can contribute to sustainable security governance. Future research should test these propositions through longitudinal fieldwork and cross-national comparison, moving the debate from endorsement to explanation.

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