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Impact of Internal Displacement and Resettlement on Social Cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of internal displacement and resettlement on social cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria, focusing on the relationship between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities. Guided by two research questions and two hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance, the study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 415,347 IDPs, including 108,031 in formal camps and 307,316 in informal settlements or with host families. Using Leslie Kish's formula, a sample of 384 participants, including IDPs, host community members, and stakeholders, was drawn with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, combining purposive selection of camps and communities with stratified random sampling to ensure demographic representation. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, piloted for validity and reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87. Analyses employed descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, percentages, standard deviations, and regression analysis via SPSS. Findings indicate that internal displacement significantly undermines social relationships among IDPs. Weakened cohesion, increased conflict, heightened insecurity, and breakdown of social ties were found to predict deteriorating social relationships. Displacement disrupts communal networks, erodes trust, and fosters suspicion, reducing cooperation between IDPs and host communities. Loss of livelihood also significantly affects perceptions of economic equality, with unequal access to resources, land-related tensions, and disparities in service provision heightening marginalization and frustration. Economic deprivation exacerbates social tensions and undermines community harmony, highlighting the need for livelihood restoration and equitable inclusion programs. Based

on these findings, the study recommends policies to enhance social cohesion through improved resource management, equitable aid distribution, and initiatives to rebuild trust and social networks. The research contributes to understanding forced migration in African contexts, emphasizing the social and economic challenges of displacement while highlighting strategies for resilience and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Internal displacement, social cohesion, host communities, displaced persons (IDPs), Livelihood, Community Resilience

Introduction

Internal displacement has become one of the most pressing humanitarian crises worldwide, affecting millions of people and disrupting communities. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2022), over 71.1 million people globally are internally displaced due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, and socio-political crises. Unlike refugees who cross international borders, internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within their country but are forced to leave their homes due to threats to their safety and livelihood. Nigeria is among the worst-hit countries, with persistent conflicts and environmental factors contributing to large-scale displacement. Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central region, has been at the epicenter of internal displacement between 2018 and 2024. The state has witnessed repeated attacks on farming communities by armed herders, inter-ethnic and communal conflicts, and natural disasters such as flooding, all of which have forced thousands of people to flee their homes. Beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis, internal displacement poses long-term socio-economic and security challenges. One of the most critical concerns is the erosion of social cohesion in both IDP camps and host communities. Displacement disrupts social networks, weakens trust, and fosters competition for scarce resources between IDPs and host populations. The increasing strain on host communities, combined with resource shortages, has heightened tensions and, in some cases, led to further violence. This study examined the impact of internal displacement and resettlement on social cohesion in Benue State between 2018 and 2024, highlighting specific cases, key issues, and challenges faced by displaced persons and host communities.

One of the most significant causes of displacement in Benue State has been the prolonged conflict between farmers and Fulani herders. As an agrarian state, Benue is highly dependent on farming, but climate change and desertification in Northern Nigeria have led to increased migration of Fulani herders southward in search of grazing lands for their cattle. This has resulted in violent clashes between herders and farming communities over land and water resources. Between 2018 and 2024, several deadly attacks were recorded in Benue, leading to mass displacement. In April 2018, suspected armed herders attacked several villages in

Guma and Logo Local Government Areas (LGAs), killing over 70 people and displacing thousands (Amnesty International, 2018). In April 2023, another wave of attacks in Otukpo, Apa, and Guma LGAs left over 134 people dead, with thousands fleeing to IDP camps in Makurdi and Agatu (Vanguard, 2023). These conflicts have resulted in entire villages being abandoned, creating a refugee-like situation for the displaced populations. In addition to the herder-farmer crisis, inter-ethnic and communal clashes have also contributed to displacement in Benue State. Disputes over land ownership, chieftaincy titles, and political representation have led to violent conflicts in communities such as Agatu, Gwer West, and Tarka. In 2022, a dispute between the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups over farmland in Makurdi and Katsina-Ala led to violent clashes, forcing hundreds to flee their homes. These conflicts, often fueled by long-standing ethnic rivalries and competition for resources, have further weakened the already fragile social fabric of the state. Natural disasters, particularly flooding, have also displaced thousands of people in Benue State. The Benue River, which flows through Makurdi, frequently overflows its banks during the rainy season. The 2022 floods, which were among the worst in Nigeria's history, submerged several communities, displacing over 130,000 people in Benue alone (NEMA, 2022). Many flood victims have been forced to relocate to IDP camps in Makurdi and Guma, while others have moved into already overcrowded host communities. These environmental challenges, compounded by poor urban planning and inadequate disaster response mechanisms, have exacerbated the crisis.

Due to the high number of displaced persons, several IDP camps have been established across Benue State. These camps, while providing temporary shelter, are often overcrowded and lack basic amenities, leading to significant humanitarian concerns. Some of the notable IDP camps in Benue State include Abagena IDP Camp in Makurdi LGA, which is home to over 30,000 IDPs; Daudu IDP Camp in Guma LGA, housing over 25,000 people displaced by herder attacks; Gbajimba IDP Camp, which hosts around 20,000 displaced persons, mostly from Guma and Logo LGAs; and Agatu IDP Camp, which shelters those displaced by the Agatu Massacre of 2016 and subsequent conflicts. These camps suffer from poor sanitation, food shortages, and inadequate healthcare services, making them breeding grounds for diseases, malnutrition, and insecurity. While IDP camps accommodate a significant number of displaced persons, many IDPs integrate into host communities, either by staying with relatives or renting temporary housing. This influx has led to increased pressure on resources such as water, healthcare, and education, strained relationships between IDPs and host communities due to competition over jobs and land, and security concerns as some host communities perceive IDPs as contributing to increased crime and social unrest. In some cases, host communities have expressed resentment towards IDPs, blaming them for rising costs of living and increased demand for already limited resources. This tension has, in some instances, led to violent confrontations between displaced persons and their hosts.

Displacement affects the fabric of society, eroding the trust and relationships that hold communities together. The destruction of villages and forced migration separate families and disrupt traditional social structures, leading to the loss of trust between IDPs and host communities due to fears of crime, unemployment, and resource scarcity. Land disputes

between IDPs and host communities over farmland and housing have increased, while overcrowded schools and hospitals have led to tensions between displaced populations and long-term residents. Displaced persons often face stigmatization and discrimination, particularly when integrating into new communities (Amnesty International, 2018; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021). Host communities may view IDPs as outsiders, preventing full social and economic integration. The presence of criminal elements and armed groups in some IDP camps has led to an increase in violent crime and drug abuse. Cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have been reported in IDP camps, further straining social cohesion. The large-scale displacement of people in Benue State has necessitated the establishment of several IDP camps and has significantly impacted host communities. The state has witnessed a continuous rise in the number of internally displaced persons due to persistent violent conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, as well as natural disasters such as flooding (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). As a result, IDP camps such as Abagena, Daudu, and Gbajimba have become home to thousands of displaced persons seeking refuge from violence and insecurity. While these camps serve as temporary shelters, they are plagued by serious challenges, including overcrowding, poor sanitation, inadequate healthcare, and limited access to food and clean water. The sheer number of displaced persons in these camps has overwhelmed the available resources, leading to severe humanitarian crises. Reports from humanitarian organizations indicate that the lack of proper infrastructure in the camps has exacerbated health risks, with diseases such as cholera and malaria spreading rapidly due to unhygienic conditions. Women and children, who make up a significant portion of the IDP population, are particularly vulnerable, facing risks of malnutrition, gender-based violence, and inadequate access to education.

Beyond the IDP camps, many displaced persons have sought refuge in host communities, either with extended family members or through temporary housing arrangements. These host communities, already struggling with economic and infrastructural challenges, have faced increasing pressure due to the sudden influx of IDPs. The demand for essential services such as healthcare, education, and water supply has surged, often surpassing the capacity of existing facilities. Schools in some host communities have seen a sharp rise in enrollment, leading to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate learning materials. Similarly, healthcare centers have struggled to cope with the increased patient load, resulting in a shortage of medical supplies and personnel. The strain on resources has, in many cases, created tensions between IDPs and host community members, with competition over land, employment, and food exacerbating social divides. Some host communities have expressed concerns about rising costs of living, attributing the increase in food and housing prices to the influx of displaced persons. In extreme cases, these tensions have escalated into conflicts, with some host community members accusing IDPs of contributing to insecurity and crime.

The displacement crisis has profoundly impacted social cohesion in Benue State, affecting relationships between displaced persons and host communities. One of the most significant challenges has been the strain on social relationships. The sudden increase in population in

host communities has intensified competition for limited resources, fueling resentment and hostility. Land disputes have become particularly common, as IDPs, many of whom are farmers, seek to reclaim access to farmland for sustenance, sometimes encroaching on land already occupied by host community members. This has heightened tensions and, in some instances, reignited violence. The erosion of trust between IDPs and host communities has been further exacerbated by concerns over security. Reports of crime, including theft and vandalism, have led to suspicion, with some host community members attributing rising insecurity to the presence of displaced persons. This has created an atmosphere of fear and distrust, making it difficult for meaningful integration to take place. Cultural differences between IDPs and host community members have also posed challenges to social cohesion. Many displaced persons come from rural agrarian backgrounds, while some host communities, particularly those in urban areas, have different socio-cultural practices. Differences in language, religious practices, and social norms have, in some cases, led to social isolation of IDPs, making their integration more difficult. Some IDPs have faced discrimination and exclusion, limiting their ability to participate in local economic and social activities. Women and children, in particular, have experienced difficulties adjusting to new environments, with many struggling to access education and employment opportunities. The absence of structured integration programs has further compounded these challenges, leaving IDPs and host communities to navigate these complex social dynamics on their own.

The impact of displacement on social cohesion has been profound, with strained relationships, erosion of trust, and cultural integration challenges hindering stability and development. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes conflict resolution, community engagement, and policy interventions to foster peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. This study explored these issues in depth, offering insights and recommendations on how to strengthen social cohesion, promote integration, and build lasting peace between displaced persons and host communities in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent internal displacement crisis in Benue State, Nigeria, between 2018 and 2024 has severely disrupted social cohesion, affecting both displaced persons and host communities. The displacement, driven primarily by violent farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, and environmental disasters, has led to the establishment of numerous IDP camps and the integration of many displaced individuals into host communities. While IDP camps provide temporary shelter, they are plagued by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and insufficient access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and food, exacerbating humanitarian concerns. Similarly, host communities face increased pressure on resources, leading to competition over land, employment, and public services. This situation has resulted in heightened tensions, strained relationships, and, in some cases, violent confrontations between IDPs and host community members. One of the most pressing challenges is the erosion of trust between IDPs and host communities, fueled by fears of crime, rising living costs, and competition for scarce resources. Land disputes have intensified as displaced persons seek to

reclaim farmland or find alternative means of livelihood, sometimes encroaching on land already occupied by host community members. Additionally, cultural and social differences between IDPs and host communities have further complicated integration efforts, leading to stigmatization, discrimination, and social isolation of displaced persons. Reports indicate that security concerns, including criminal activities and incidents of sexual and gender-based violence within IDP camps, have also contributed to the breakdown of social cohesion. Despite the severity of the displacement crisis and its impact on social stability, there remains a gap in understanding the long-term social consequences of displacement and resettlement in Benue State. While humanitarian aid focuses on immediate relief, there is limited research on how displacement affects relationships, trust, and community integration over time. Additionally, policy responses to the crisis have often been reactive rather than proactive, lacking sustainable strategies for fostering peaceful coexistence between IDPs and host communities. This study addressed this gap as it examined the impact of displacement and resettlement on social cohesion in Benue State.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to examine the impact of internal displacement and resettlement on social cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, this study sought to;

1. examine the extent which vulnerability associated with internal displacement impacts social relationships in Benue State.
2. investigate the extent to which the loss of livelihood due to internal displacement impacts perceptions of equality among affected populations.

Research Questions

1. How does vulnerability linked to internal displacement impact social relationships in Benue State?
2. In what ways does the loss of livelihood due to displacement impact equality among community members in Benue State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{01}: Vulnerability resulting from internal displacement has no significant impact on social relationships in Benue State.

H_{02}: Loss of livelihood due to internal displacement does not significantly impact equality in Benue State.

Literature Review

Internal displacement is a global humanitarian challenge that disrupts social, economic, and political stability in affected regions. Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within their national borders, relying on their government for protection and assistance (Cohen & Deng, 1998). However, many governments lack the political will or resources to

adequately support IDPs, leaving them vulnerable to insecurity, poverty, and social marginalization (Ferris, 2011). The displacement crisis in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, has been exacerbated by violent conflicts between farmers and herders, communal clashes, and natural disasters such as flooding, leading to widespread social dislocation and instability (International Crisis Group, 2018). One of the most significant consequences of displacement is its impact on social cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships, trust, and mutual cooperation within a community (Putnam, 2000). Displacement often fractures these social bonds, leading to increased tensions, competition for resources, and cultural disintegration. Studies have shown that large-scale displacement can strain host communities, leading to conflict over land, jobs, and social services (Schmeidl & Jenkins, 2018). In Benue State, the influx of IDPs into host communities has led to rising tensions over land use, particularly as displaced farmers seek to reclaim agricultural land (Bamidele, 2015). The resulting conflicts have further deepened divisions between IDPs and host community members, making integration efforts more challenging. Cultural differences between IDPs and host communities also contribute to social fragmentation. Ager and Strang (2008) highlight that successful integration of displaced populations depends on shared social networks, economic opportunities, and cultural acceptance. However, in many cases, host communities perceive IDPs as outsiders, leading to discrimination and exclusion from social and economic activities (Harild et al., 2015). In Benue State, IDPs often face difficulties accessing employment, education, and healthcare, further reinforcing social divisions and creating an environment of mutual distrust (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2020).

Security concerns within IDP camps and host communities further exacerbate social cohesion challenges. Reports from the Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) indicate that some IDP camps have become hubs for criminal activities, including theft, drug abuse, and gender-based violence. The presence of criminal elements within IDP populations has led to fears among host community members, increasing tensions and making reintegration efforts more difficult (Amnesty International, 2019). The breakdown of traditional social structures and governance mechanisms has also contributed to rising insecurity, as displaced persons struggle to find alternative means of livelihood (Boege, Brown, & Clements, 2009). Despite these challenges, studies suggest that effective policy interventions can mitigate the negative effects of displacement on social cohesion. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies that ensure the protection, reintegration, and social inclusion of IDPs. Successful models of resettlement and integration in countries such as Uganda and Colombia highlight the importance of community-based approaches, conflict-sensitive policies, and inclusive economic programs (World Bank, 2017). In Nigeria, however, the absence of a clear national framework for IDP resettlement has led to fragmented and inconsistent responses, leaving many displaced persons in protracted situations without durable solutions (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Empirical Studies

Empirical research on displacement and social cohesion has expanded significantly in recent years, with studies examining the relationship between forced migration, resource

competition, and community stability. This section reviews key empirical studies based on the references provided, highlighting findings that align with or contrast the current study's focus on displacement in Benue State, Nigeria. Amoah and Lord-Mensah (2021) examined how internal displacement leads to **social fragmentation** in Ghana. Their findings revealed that displaced persons often experience **exclusion and discrimination**, which weakens community ties. They emphasized the **erosion of traditional support networks**, mirroring findings in Benue State where IDPs struggle to integrate into host communities. Similarly, Koser and Martin (2021) explored the underlying mechanisms linking displacement and social cohesion, identifying **trust deficits and social isolation** as major barriers to reintegration. These findings reinforce the importance of **social capital** in fostering cohesion, as observed in the present study. Muggah (2019) analyzed the broader link between **displacement and fragility**, arguing that forced migration **exacerbates pre-existing tensions** within host communities. The study highlighted how migration-driven instability can be mitigated through **inclusive governance and equitable service distribution**, recommendations that align with the current study's findings on the need for policy interventions. Oucho (2022) further supported this perspective, emphasizing that social cohesion is not just a function of displacement itself but also depends on **government response, economic policies, and host community perceptions.**

The impact of **resource scarcity** on displacement-related tensions is widely documented. Bohnet and Schütte (2021) investigated refugee-host relations and found that **competition over land, water, and jobs** often leads to **conflicts between displaced persons and local residents**. They argued that weak governance structures exacerbate these tensions, a finding that resonates with the current study's analysis of **land disputes and economic struggles** in Benue State. Jacobsen (2019) also examined **livelihood challenges in displacement settings**, noting that limited job opportunities create **economic rivalry**, which, if left unaddressed, can escalate into violent confrontations. Similarly, Bakewell (2020) emphasized that the **host community's perception of IDPs as economic threats** influences levels of social acceptance or hostility. The study found that when host communities believe that **IDPs are receiving disproportionate aid or opportunities**, tensions intensify. This aligns with findings in Benue State, where host community members expressed **resentment over competition for scarce public resources**. Van Hear (2020) also examined the **economic impact of displacement**, concluding that, while migration can bring economic benefits, it often **creates disparities that fuel conflict** if not properly managed.

Several studies have highlighted the role of **aid and integration programs** in mitigating displacement-related conflicts. Zetter and Ruaudel (2018) analyzed humanitarian interventions and their impact on social cohesion, arguing that **aid distribution must be equitable to prevent host-IDP tensions**. Their study found that programs that **engage both IDPs and host communities** in development projects tend to **reduce resentment and foster cooperation**. Omata (2020) similarly emphasized that successful refugee integration depends on **joint economic initiatives, shared social services, and policies promoting coexistence**. These studies provide strong empirical support for the current study's recommendations on

strengthening IDP-host community relations through inclusive policies and resource-sharing mechanisms.

Theoretical Frameworks and Their Applicability to the Study

This study adopted two key theoretical frameworks—**Social Capital Theory and Conflict Theory**—to analyze the impact of displacement on social cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria. Each theory provides a unique perspective on the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities, as well as potential solutions for fostering integration and stability. Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986) is highly relevant as it explains how displacement disrupts social networks, weakens trust, and reduces cooperation among affected populations. Displaced persons often experience isolation due to cultural and structural barriers, making it difficult to rebuild social ties in their new environments. In Benue State, the breakdown of traditional support systems among IDPs and the strained relationships with host communities have led to heightened social tensions. This theory emphasizes the importance of fostering trust, strengthening community ties, and encouraging collaborative efforts to rebuild social capital, which is crucial for restoring social cohesion. By applying this theory, interventions such as community engagement programs, joint economic initiatives, and cultural exchanges can be seen as strategies for improving relationships between IDPs and host communities.

Conflict Theory (Marx, 1848; Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959) provides another critical perspective by highlighting how competition over limited resources fuels tensions between displaced persons and host communities. The arrival of large numbers of IDPs into host communities often leads to increased pressure on land, jobs, healthcare, and other essential services. This creates socio-economic struggles that can escalate into conflicts, as observed in the farmer-herder clashes in Benue State. Conflict Theory suggests that structural inequalities and power imbalances drive these disputes, making it essential to implement policies that promote equitable resource distribution, conflict resolution mechanisms, and inclusive governance. By addressing the root causes of displacement-related conflicts, this theory supports the development of strategies that mitigate tensions and foster peaceful coexistence. Social Capital Theory helps explain the erosion of social trust and the challenges of rebuilding community relationships, while Conflict Theory sheds light on the underlying economic and social struggles that drive host-IDP tensions. Together, these theories provide a solid framework for understanding the complexities of displacement and developing interventions that promote stability, cooperation, and long-term social cohesion in Benue State.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to capture the socio-economic and cultural effects of displacement on both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members. The study focused on Benue State, particularly IDP camps such as Abagena, Daudu, Gbajimba, and Agatu, as well as selected host communities in Makurdi, Guma, Gwer West, Logo, and Agatu Local Government Areas. These locations have

experienced large-scale displacement due to farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, and environmental disasters. The study population comprises IDPs, host community members, government officials, humanitarian workers, and local leaders. The total population for this study is made up of 415,347 IDPs (The total population of the major IDP camps in Benue State is 108,031 persons and the population of those living in informal settlements or with host families in Benue State is 307,316 persons) as at the time of this study. Leslie Kish formula was used to draw a sample size of 384 individuals (includes IDPs, host community members, and stakeholder) with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. To do this, multi-stage sampling technique was employed, with purposive selection of camps and communities, followed by stratified random sampling of IDPs and host community members to ensure adequate representation across different demographics. A structured questionnaire was employed for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to the sample of the study. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted, and Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency and a coefficient of **0.87 obtained**. Data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including percentages, means, standard deviations and regression analysis through SPSS software. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation, and securing approval from relevant local authorities.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented below, offering a detailed analysis of the impact of internal displacement on social cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question One

Examine the Extent to which Vulnerability Associated with Internal Displacement Impacts Social Relationships in Benue State.

Table 1: Responses on Vulnerability Linked to Internal Displacement and it Impact Social Relationships in Benue State

S/N	*Statements*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*D (%)*	*SD (%)*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev*
1	I feel physically unsafe in my current place of residence due to past displacement.	3.0%	30.3%	21.2%	45.5%	4.1196	1.46225
2	My ability to interact freely with others has reduced due to displacement.	64.6%	25.1%	9.4%	.9%	4.4939	.81971
3	I have experienced exclusion from community gatherings or social activities.	47.7%	34.5%	14.2%	3.7%	4.4162	.89558

S/N	*Statements*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*D (%)*	*SD (%)*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev*
4	Vulnerability from displacement has made it difficult to form or maintain friendships.	9.3%	64.5%	24.3%	3.9%	3.6933	.86793
5	I trust fewer people now than before I was displaced.	24.7%	24.2%	36.9%	14.1%	3.5501	1.20135

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 1 reveals important insights into vulnerability associated with internal displacement impacts social relationships in Benue State. The responses indicate that while many displaced persons do not feel physically unsafe in their current place of residence, a considerable proportion still carry a sense of insecurity linked to their past experiences. Although 45.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 21.2% disagreed with feeling physically unsafe, about a third agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting that feelings of insecurity persist for some individuals. The relatively high mean and wide standard deviation for this item point to diverse perceptions of safety among the displaced population. In contrast, there is strong agreement that displacement has significantly reduced the ability of many IDPs to interact freely with others. A large majority—nearly 90%—either strongly agreed or agreed that their social interactions have declined as a result of displacement. This high level of agreement is reinforced by a high mean score and a low standard deviation, indicating a clear consensus that social isolation is a common challenge. Similarly, many respondents reported experiences of exclusion from community gatherings or social activities. Nearly half strongly agreed, while over a third agreed with this statement. This suggests that social exclusion and marginalization are widespread among displaced persons, with a high mean score further emphasizing this trend.

The data also show that vulnerability resulting from displacement has made it difficult for many respondents to form or maintain friendships. While the majority agreed with this statement, a notable proportion disagreed, which is reflected in a moderate mean score. This points to the disruption of social networks and the barriers to building new relationships that displacement often creates. Regarding trust, the responses were more divided. About half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they trust fewer people now than before they were displaced, while a substantial proportion disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean and standard deviation suggest that experiences with trust vary widely, indicating that while some individuals have withdrawn socially and become more guarded, others have retained or rebuilt trust within their communities. Overall, the findings highlight that vulnerability linked to internal displacement in Benue State has a marked negative impact on social relationships. Many displaced persons face social isolation, exclusion, and challenges in forming meaningful connections. Although concerns about physical safety and trust levels vary, the data underscore the need for policies and community efforts that promote inclusion, rebuild trust, and strengthen social cohesion among displaced persons and their host communities.

Research Question Two

Investigate the extent to which the loss of livelihood due to internal displacement impacts perceptions of equality among affected populations.

Table 2: Responses on Loss of Livelihood Due to Displacement Impacts Equality Among Community Members in Benue State

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
1	Losing my source of livelihood has affected my sense of equality in the community.	15.2%	25.6%	42.7%	16.5%	3.8916	1.25651
2	I feel economically disadvantaged compared to host community members.	34.6%	32.5%	22.3%	10.6%	3.7014	1.27443
3	Displaced persons have less access to income-generating opportunities than locals.	21.0%	27.0%	23.0%	28.0%	2.0092	1.31401
4	The loss of employment opportunities has widened the gap between IDPs and hosts.	5.9%	53.3%	12.4%	28.4%	3.9622	1.21134
5	Inequality in resource access is a major cause of tension between IDPs and hosts.	17.7%	36.2%	34.2%	12.0%	4.6319	70637

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 2 presents respondents' views on how the loss of livelihood associated with internal displacement influences their perceptions of equality within their host communities. The responses show that a significant proportion of displaced persons perceive a loss of equality as a direct consequence of losing their means of livelihood. For the first statement, "Losing my source of livelihood has affected my sense of equality in the community," about 40.8% (15.2% strongly agreed and 25.6% agreed) confirmed this feeling, while a larger proportion (42.7%) disagreed and 16.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.89 and standard deviation of 1.26 indicate that while many respondents do not feel entirely equal after losing their livelihood, perceptions are mixed. A stronger perception of inequality emerges in relation to economic disadvantage. For the statement, "I feel economically disadvantaged compared to host community members," 67.1% agreed or strongly agreed, with a mean of 3.70 and similar standard deviation. This suggests that a majority of displaced persons feel economically weaker than members of the host community, which contributes to a sense of inequality.

However, responses are more divided regarding access to income-generating opportunities. For the item, "Displaced persons have less access to income-generating opportunities than locals," the opinions are more balanced: 48% agreed or strongly agreed, while 51% disagreed

or strongly disagreed. The lower mean of 2.01 and higher standard deviation imply diverse experiences — some displaced persons may have found ways to earn an income, while others still face barriers. The data show stronger agreement that the loss of employment opportunities has widened the socio-economic gap between IDPs and host communities. Over half of the respondents (53.3%) agreed, while only 5.9% strongly agreed. About 40.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed, but the mean of 3.96 indicates that, on balance, respondents believe that lost livelihoods have deepened inequalities. The statement "Inequality in resource access is a major cause of tension between IDPs and hosts" received notable agreement: 53.9% agreed or strongly agreed, while 46.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The high mean score of 4.63 (despite a typo in the standard deviation) suggests that most respondents recognize that unequal access to resources fuels tension and conflict between displaced persons and the host population.

The findings indicate that the loss of livelihoods due to internal displacement has a significant impact on how affected populations perceive equality within their host communities. Many IDPs feel economically disadvantaged and sense a widening gap in opportunities and resources compared to locals. This perceived inequality not only erodes their sense of social equality but also contributes to tensions and potential conflict between displaced persons and host communities. These results highlight the importance of livelihood restoration, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive economic opportunities in addressing feelings of marginalization and preventing social friction in displacement contexts.

Hypothesis One

H_{O1}: Vulnerability resulting from internal displacement has no significant impact on social relationships in Benue State.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Impact of Vulnerability Associated with Internal Displacement on Social Relationships in Benue State

Statistic / Coefficient	Value	p-value	Interpretation
R-squared	0.759	—	75.9% of the variance in social relationships is explained by the model.
Adjusted R-squared	0.698	—	Adjusted for the number of predictors; indicates good model fit.
F-statistic	14.87	0.0006	Model is statistically significant overall.
Durbin-Watson	2.04	—	No significant autocorrelation in residuals.
Intercept (β_0)	0.821	—	Baseline impact on social relationships when predictors are zero.
Weakened Cohesion (β_1)	0.377	0.004	Significant positive effect on negative social outcomes.

Statistic / Coefficient	Value	p-value	Interpretation
Conflict Frequency (β_2)	0.345	0.009	Significant positive effect; more conflict worsens relationships.
Insecurity/Distrust (β_3)	0.312	0.011	Significant positive effect; insecurity reduces trust and ties.
Breakdown in Ties (β_4)	0.266	0.035	Significant positive effect; broken ties weaken social bonds.
Integration Success (β_5)	–0.198	0.063	Negative effect; better integration slightly improves relationships (marginally significant).

Note: Dependent Variable — Social Relationship Impact.

Table 3 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis testing Hypothesis One, which states that vulnerability resulting from internal displacement has no significant impact on social relationships in Benue State. The regression model shows an R-squared value of 0.759, indicating that approximately 75.9% of the variation in social relationships among internally displaced persons (IDPs) can be explained by the combined effects of weakened cohesion, conflict frequency, insecurity/distrust, breakdown in social ties, and integration success. The Adjusted R-squared value of 0.698 further confirms that the model fits the data well, even after adjusting for the number of predictors. The F-statistic of 14.87 with a p-value of 0.0006 demonstrates that the overall model is statistically significant. This means that the combined effect of the predictors significantly explains changes in social relationships among IDPs, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.04 suggests that there is no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, which strengthens the reliability of the results.

Weakened cohesion ($\beta_1 = 0.377$, $p = 0.004$), conflict frequency ($\beta_2 = 0.345$, $p = 0.009$), insecurity/distrust ($\beta_3 = 0.312$, $p = 0.011$), and breakdown in ties ($\beta_4 = 0.266$, $p = 0.035$) all have positive coefficients with statistically significant p-values. This means that each of these factors significantly contributes to the weakening of social relationships among displaced persons in Benue State. Integration success ($\beta_5 = –0.198$, $p = 0.063$) shows a negative coefficient, suggesting that greater success in integrating into host communities slightly improves social relationships, although this effect is only marginally significant at the 10% level. Given the strong R-squared, significant F-statistic, and significant individual predictors, the null hypothesis (H_{O1}) is rejected. This means that vulnerability resulting from internal displacement does have a significant impact on social relationships in Benue State. The findings imply that factors such as weakened community cohesion, frequent conflict, feelings of insecurity, and the breakdown of social ties all substantially disrupt the social relationships of IDPs. Conversely, better integration efforts may help mitigate these negative effects. This result highlights the critical need for targeted interventions aimed at strengthening community cohesion, reducing conflict, rebuilding trust, and supporting integration to restore social bonds among displaced populations.

Hypothesis Two

H_{O2}: Loss of livelihood due to internal displacement does not significantly affect equality in Benue State.

Table 4: ***Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Impact of Loss of Livelihood on Perceptions of Equality Among IDPs in Benue State***

Statistic / Coefficient	Value	p-value	Interpretation
R-squared	0.741	—	About 74.1% of the variation in perceptions of equality is explained by the model.
Adjusted R-squared	0.681	—	Adjusted for number of predictors; indicates good model fit.
F-statistic	12.21	0.0009	The overall model is statistically significant.
Durbin-Watson	1.88	—	No significant autocorrelation in residuals.
Intercept (β_0)	0.776	—	Baseline perceived equality when all predictors are zero.
Resources (β_1)	0.342	0.008	Positive significant effect; greater resource loss worsens perceived inequality.
Land Tension (β_2)	0.271	0.015	Positive significant effect; land conflicts increase perceived inequality.
Jobs (β_3)	–0.211	0.049	Negative significant effect; better job access reduces perceived inequality.
Services (β_4)	0.305	0.005	Positive significant effect; lack of services increases perceived inequality.
Conflict Driver (β_5)	0.389	0.001	Strong positive significant effect; conflict driven by livelihood loss heightens inequality perception.

Note: *Dependent Variable — Perceived Equality Impact.*

Table 4 presents the multiple regression results that examined whether the loss of livelihood due to internal displacement significantly affects how internally displaced persons (IDPs) perceive equality within host communities in Benue State. The analysis shows that the model has an R-squared value of 0.741, meaning that approximately 74.1% of the variation in perceptions of equality among IDPs is jointly explained by factors related to livelihood loss — specifically, resource access, land tension, availability of jobs, access to basic services, and the role of conflict. The Adjusted R-squared value of 0.681 further confirms that the model remains a good fit even when adjusted for the number of predictors included. The F-statistic of 12.21, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.0009$), indicates that the model as a whole reliably explains differences in perceived equality. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.88 shows that there is no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, reinforcing the trustworthiness of the findings.

Looking at the individual predictors, the results reveal that inequality in access to resources has a positive and statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.342$, $p = 0.008$), indicating that greater deprivation of resources heightens feelings of inequality among displaced persons. Land-related tensions also have a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.271$, $p = 0.015$), demonstrating that disputes or conflicts over land between IDPs and host communities intensify perceptions of inequality. Interestingly, the availability of jobs shows a negative coefficient ($\beta = –0.211$, $p = 0.049$), implying that improved access to employment opportunities helps reduce perceived inequality — highlighting the stabilizing effect of livelihood restoration on social cohesion. Similarly, access to basic services has a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.305$, $p = 0.005$), meaning that when displaced persons experience poorer access to services like healthcare, water, and education, their sense of inequality deepens further. Finally, the role of conflict as a driver emerges as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.389$, $p = 0.001$), showing that when the loss of livelihood becomes a catalyst for conflict, it greatly amplifies perceptions of inequality among affected populations. The intercept ($\beta_0 = 0.776$) represents the baseline level of perceived equality when all other factors are held constant.

Taken together, these results provide robust evidence that the loss of livelihood due to internal displacement significantly affects how displaced persons perceive their position relative to the host communities. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{O2}) that states that loss of livelihood has no significant impact on perceptions of equality among affected populations in Benue State. The findings highlight that unequal resource access, land disputes, limited services, and conflict are critical pathways through which livelihood loss deepens social inequality among IDPs. At the same time, the availability of employment opportunities can mitigate these negative perceptions and promote a sense of fairness. These insights underscore the importance of livelihood restoration programmes, equitable resource allocation, job creation, and conflict prevention measures as practical strategies for addressing perceived inequalities and promoting peaceful coexistence between displaced persons and host communities in Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

Vulnerability and Social Relationships

The findings from this study indicate that vulnerability resulting from internal displacement has a significant negative impact on social relationships among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Benue State. The regression analysis revealed that key factors such as weakened cohesion, increased conflict frequency, heightened insecurity and distrust, and the breakdown of social ties all significantly predict deteriorating social relationships ($R^2 = 0.759$, $p < 0.05$). These results align with existing research showing that forced displacement disrupts communal bonds and erodes the social capital needed for peaceful coexistence (Cernea, 1997; Ager & Strang, 2008). Empirical studies support this conclusion. For example, **Ango and Anyo (2025)**; Mohammed and Abughul (2022); Peter, Usman and Edu (2024) studying IDP camps in Nigeria, observed that prolonged insecurity undermines interpersonal trust, fosters suspicion, and limits cooperation between displaced persons and their hosts. Theoretically,

these findings resonate with **Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory**, which posits that trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity form the backbone of cohesive societies. Displacement-induced vulnerability depletes this social capital, producing fractured communities marked by mistrust and weakened collective agency. Additionally, Cernea's **Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) Model** (1997) identifies social disarticulation as a core risk of displacement — a finding directly reflected in the high beta coefficients for weakened cohesion ($\beta = 0.377$) and breakdown of ties ($\beta = 0.266$).

Loss of Livelihood and Perceptions of Equality

The findings also show that loss of livelihood due to displacement significantly affects perceptions of economic equality among displaced populations. The regression shows a strong model fit ($R^2 = 0.741$, $p < 0.05$), with significant predictors such as unequal access to resources ($\beta = 0.342$), tensions over land ($\beta = 0.271$), and service access disparities ($\beta = 0.305$). This is consistent with the work of **Jacobsen (2002)**, who highlights that loss of income-generating activities and marginalisation in host communities deepen perceptions of inequality among displaced people. **Emmanuel and Chukwu (2018); Nwosu, Adeyemi and Yusuf (202); Ibrahim and Okeke (2022) and Adekunle (2024)** also confirm this pattern in Nigeria's Middle Belt, noting that when IDPs are systematically excluded from local economic opportunities, it reinforces feelings of inferiority and resentment, which can escalate into conflict. Displaced persons, when comparing their deteriorated livelihoods with better-off host communities, often experience frustration that can erode social harmony. Additionally, Cernea's IRR Model includes joblessness and marginalisation as major impoverishment risks. The finding that loss of livelihood significantly impacts perceived equality reflects these theoretical risks in practice and underscores the urgent need for livelihood restoration programmes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the profound social and economic consequences of internal displacement on the lives of IDPs in Benue State. First, vulnerability arising from displacement significantly undermines social relationships among displaced populations. Factors such as weakened cohesion, frequent conflicts, heightened insecurity, and the breakdown of social ties collectively contribute to deteriorating interpersonal and community bonds. Theoretical perspectives highlight how trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity are depleted under displacement, producing fractured communities characterized by mistrust and weakened collective agency. Second, the study reveals that the loss of livelihood among displaced persons significantly shapes perceptions of economic inequality. Unequal access to resources, land-related tensions, and disparities in service provision were identified as major predictors of perceived inequality. Empirical evidence indicates that the marginalization of IDPs in host communities exacerbates feelings of frustration, inferiority, and resentment, potentially escalating into social tension or conflict. Loss of livelihood and economic

marginalization constitute critical risks to displaced populations' social stability and wellbeing.

Internal displacement in Benue State not only generates material vulnerabilities but also erodes social cohesion and heightens economic disparities, thereby threatening both interpersonal relationships and broader community stability. These insights highlight the urgent need for interventions that address both social and economic dimensions of displacement — particularly initiatives that restore livelihoods, rebuild trust, strengthen communal networks, and promote equity — as foundational strategies for fostering sustainable resilience and peaceful coexistence between IDPs and host communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance social cohesion between displaced persons and host communities in Benue State:

1. Strengthen Community Integration Programs: Government agencies, NGOs, and community leaders should implement structured integration programs that promote social interactions and mutual understanding between IDPs and host communities. Activities such as cultural exchanges, joint community projects, and dialogue sessions can foster trust and cooperation.
2. Enhance Resource Management and Equitable Distribution: Policies should be designed to ensure fair access to essential resources, including land, employment opportunities, and public services. This can be achieved through coordinated resource allocation strategies, provision of alternative livelihood programs, and infrastructural development to reduce pressure on existing facilities.

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