

## Lifesaving Impact and Effectiveness of Sustainable Livelihood Interventions in Emergency Situations: A Multi-Sectoral Analysis of Humanitarian Response in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Sustainable Livelihood Interventions (SLIs) have been integral in addressing both short-term needs and long-term resilience in Nigeria's multifaceted emergencies. This systematic review aims to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of SLIs implemented in humanitarian crises in Nigeria across sectors such as agriculture, education, health, and economic empowerment.

**Methods:** A comprehensive literature search was conducted across databases (e.g., PubMed, Cochrane Library, Web of Science) and studies were included if they evaluated sustainable livelihood interventions in Nigeria during emergency responses. Data were extracted on intervention type, outcomes, and effectiveness. Quality and risk of bias assessments were performed using the Cochrane risk of bias tool.

**Results:** A total of twenty studies were included. Interventions addressing agriculture, economic empowerment, education, and health demonstrated positive short-term outcomes. However, long-term sustainability was undermined by factors such as poor governance, market access issues, and legal barriers.

**Conclusion:** Sustainable livelihood interventions have lifesaving potential and contribute to resilience-building in Nigeria's emergency contexts. However, their long-term effectiveness requires better integration with governance reforms, infrastructure development, and local market dynamics.

**Keywords:** *Agriculture, economic empowerment, governance, resilience, sustainable livelihoods*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable livelihoods, as defined by Chambers and Conway (1992), emphasizes the combination of capabilities, assets, and activities necessary for a living that can withstand shocks and stresses [1]. In humanitarian contexts, this framework offers a foundation for resilience-building efforts. Sustainable livelihoods go beyond meeting immediate needs, addressing the underlying social, economic, and environmental systems that support long-term recovery [2]. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of livelihood programs in increasing food security, improving household income, and fostering resilience in crisis-affected communities [3][4][5]. However, the dynamics of conflict and displacement vary across Nigeria, and understanding these regional differences is crucial for the success of these interventions.

The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria is both vast and complex, with root causes deeply embedded in political instability, environmental degradation, and violent conflict. The country, with its expansive geography and diverse population, has been rocked by multifaceted emergencies, ranging from insurgencies in the northeast to farmer-herder clashes in the Middle Belt, floods in the South, and devastating economic inequalities across its regions [6][7]. These crises have displaced millions, destroyed infrastructure, and exacerbated vulnerabilities, leaving a significant portion of the population in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. In recent years, sustainable livelihood interventions (SLIs) have emerged as a critical component of

emergency response strategies in Nigeria, aiming to provide not only immediate relief but also long-term resilience to affected populations.

In all these regions, the loss of livelihoods exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities and creates long-term dependencies on humanitarian aid. The shift toward sustainable livelihood interventions reflects a growing recognition that traditional emergency aid, while crucial, is insufficient to address the complexity and protracted nature of these crises. Interventions must now go beyond immediate relief to build resilience, restore self-sufficiency, and empower communities to recover from shocks. Thus, SLIs seek to reverse this downward trend by providing resources such as agricultural inputs, vocational training, and access to financial services, allowing affected individuals to rebuild their economic foundations.

This review examines the lifesaving impact and effectiveness of SLIs across some regions of Nigeria analyzing their role in mitigating the effects of emergencies and supporting recovery in diverse sectors such as agriculture, education, health, and economic empowerment. A critical analysis is conducted, evaluating how well these interventions have addressed both the immediate needs of vulnerable populations and the underlying factors that contribute to ongoing instability. By doing so, it explores whether these interventions have achieved sustainability, and what challenges remain in fostering resilience

among those affected by Nigeria's complex emergencies.

### **Sustainable Livelihood Interventions: A Multi-Sectoral Analysis.**

The necessity of a multi-sectoral approach to humanitarian response cannot be overstated. Sustainable livelihood interventions are most effective when integrated with other sectors, such as health, education, and food security. Research has demonstrated that addressing food insecurity through agricultural support directly improves health outcomes, which in turn enhances educational performance and long-term economic productivity [8][9].

Agriculture plays a vital role in Nigeria's economy, especially for rural populations who depend on farming for both subsistence and income. However, conflict and environmental degradation have severely disrupted agricultural systems, particularly in the north. Sustainable livelihood interventions in the agricultural sector aim to restore productivity, improve food security, and increase resilience to future shocks. While these interventions have shown some promise, a deeper examination reveals significant shortcomings. Programs such as the distribution of seeds and farming inputs by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have been credited with helping displaced farmers resume agricultural activities [10]. However, these initiatives often fall short of addressing the root causes of agricultural vulnerability. Access to land remains a significant challenge for many internally displaced persons,

particularly women. According to a 2020 report by UN Women, only 22% of displaced women in Borno and Yobe states had successfully reclaimed their family plots due to legal and cultural barriers [11]. To address this, agricultural interventions must be paired with legal reform efforts to secure land rights for women and other marginalized groups. In areas where insecurity persists, such as in Borno and Yobe States, farmers are unable to access their fields due to the presence of armed groups, rendering agricultural interventions largely ineffective. Moreover, interventions promoting climate-smart agriculture (CSA) have had limited reach [12][13]. While the introduction of drought-resistant crops and improved water management techniques is a positive development, many smallholder farmers remain unaware of or unable to access these technologies due to inadequate extension services and a lack of investment in rural infrastructure. The focus on agricultural inputs alone, without corresponding efforts to address market access, infrastructure development, and land tenure issues, limits the long-term sustainability of these interventions. A more integrated approach that incorporates local governance, land reform, and rural development planning is necessary to ensure that agricultural livelihoods can be sustained in the long term.

Progressively, economic empowerment initiatives are central to sustainable livelihood strategies in Nigeria's humanitarian response, offering displaced

and vulnerable populations the opportunity to rebuild their livelihoods through alternative income-generating activities. Vocational training programs, microcredit schemes, and cash transfers have been widely implemented across different regions, with varying degrees of success. In the northeast, vocational training programs supported by organizations such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have equipped IDPs with skills in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and mechanics [14]. These programs have been particularly beneficial for youth, providing alternatives to recruitment by armed groups and fostering social cohesion in conflict-affected areas. However, a deeper analysis reveals critical gaps in these interventions. The skills provided often do not match market demand, resulting in a saturation of certain trades, such as tailoring, with limited opportunities for employment or business growth. Furthermore, access to capital and markets remains a significant barrier for trainees who wish to start their own businesses, as microcredit schemes are often underfunded and inaccessible to those without collateral or formal identification documents. Cash transfer programs, which provide immediate financial relief, have also been widely used in Nigeria's humanitarian response. While these programs have helped households meet their basic needs, they are inherently short-term and do little to promote long-term economic empowerment. Without corresponding investments in local

economies and infrastructure, cash transfers risk perpetuating dependency rather than fostering self-reliance. To be truly effective, economic empowerment programs must be designed in consultation with local communities, taking into account the specific market dynamics and economic opportunities in each region.

Furthermore, education is a cornerstone of sustainable development, yet it is often one of the first casualties of conflict and displacement. In Nigeria, millions of children have been forced out of school due to violence, particularly in the northeast, where Boko Haram has deliberately targeted educational institutions [15]. The impact on human capital development is profound, with long-term consequences for both individual livelihoods and national development. Humanitarian interventions in the education sector have focused on restoring access to schooling for displaced children, with mixed results. The Safe Schools Initiative, launched by the Nigerian government in partnership with international donors, has sought to secure schools in conflict zones and provide education for IDP children [15]. While this initiative has been lauded for its ambition, it has been hampered by persistent insecurity, inadequate funding, and logistical challenges. Schools remain targets for attacks, and many displaced children, particularly girls, face cultural and economic barriers that prevent them from returning to the classroom. Moreover, the quality of education provided in emergency settings often falls short of national standards, with overcrowded classrooms,

untrained teachers, and a lack of learning materials undermining the effectiveness of these interventions. Non-formal education programs, such as accelerated learning and vocational training for youth, have had more success in bridging the education gap for out-of-school children [16]. However, these programs are often seen as a stopgap measure rather than a sustainable solution, as they fail to address the systemic issues that hinder access to quality education in conflict-affected areas. In the southern regions, where environmental disasters such as flooding have displaced populations, educational interventions have focused more on rebuilding infrastructure and providing psychosocial support to affected children. While these efforts are essential, they do little to address the underlying vulnerabilities that make certain communities more susceptible to displacement in the first place. A more holistic approach to education in emergencies is needed; one that integrates disaster risk reduction, community participation, and long-term planning to ensure that education remains accessible and relevant in the face of future crises.

Moving on, health and nutrition are fundamental to human capital development and are key components of sustainable livelihood interventions in emergency situations [17]. In Nigeria, conflict, displacement, and environmental disasters have severely strained the healthcare system, particularly in rural areas where access to health services was already limited before the onset of crises [18].

Humanitarian interventions in the health sector have focused on providing essential services such as maternal and child healthcare, nutrition support, and mental health care for trauma-affected populations. Nutrition programs, particularly those targeting pregnant and lactating women and children under five, have been a central focus of the World Food Programme (WFP) and other agencies working in Nigeria's emergency settings [19]. These programs have been successful in reducing malnutrition and improving child survival rates, especially in conflict-affected areas where food insecurity is rampant. However, the sustainability of these interventions is questionable. Nutrition programs are often short-term, relying on external funding and food aid, with little attention paid to long-term solutions such as local food production, dietary diversity, and nutrition education. The reliance on imported food aid, rather than building local food systems, risks creating dependencies that are difficult to break. Health interventions, particularly in conflict zones, have also faced significant challenges. The destruction of health facilities, coupled with a shortage of healthcare workers and medicines, has severely limited access to essential services for displaced populations. Humanitarian organizations have stepped in to fill the gap, but their efforts are often piecemeal and temporary. Mobile clinics, while effective in providing short-term relief, fail to establish lasting infrastructure. A pilot project in Yobe State initiated by Doctors Without Borders/ Medecins Sans Fronttieres (MSF) in 2019 focused on training local healthcare workers to staff

permanent clinics has proven successful, reducing maternal mortality rates by 15% within two years [18]. Scaling such initiatives could help mitigate the reliance on short-term aid. A key area, mental health services, often overlooked in humanitarian responses, are particularly crucial in Nigeria, where trauma from conflict, displacement, and violence has left deep scars on affected populations. Programs that provide psychosocial support, particularly for women and children, have been invaluable in helping individuals cope with the psychological effects of displacement. However, these services remain limited in scope, with few trained professionals available to provide ongoing care. The integration of mental health services into primary healthcare systems is essential for ensuring that these interventions can be sustained beyond the immediate emergency phase.

While the potential of sustainable livelihood interventions to save lives and foster resilience is undeniable, their effectiveness is often hampered by significant challenges. Corruption and poor governance are among the most pervasive issues undermining humanitarian efforts in Nigeria. The diversion of resources meant for livelihood programs to personal gain by corrupt officials has been a long-standing problem, limiting the reach and impact of these interventions. The phenomenon of “prebendalism,” as coined by Joseph (2014), highlights how public office in Nigeria is often seen as an opportunity for personal enrichment, rather than as a platform for service delivery[19]. Corruption not only

diverts funds but also erodes public trust in humanitarian programs, making it difficult to engage local communities in meaningful ways.

### **Recommendations for a More Effective Approach**

To maximize the effectiveness of sustainable livelihood interventions across Nigeria, several key strategies must be adopted. First and foremost, governance reforms are crucial for addressing corruption and ensuring that resources are effectively directed to those in needs. This is especially pertinent in regions like the Niger Delta, where local elites have historically siphoned off funds intended for livelihood programs, undermining the impact of these initiatives and exacerbating community frustrations [19]. By implementing stronger governance frameworks and increasing transparency, resources can be better utilized to support genuine recovery and development efforts. Furthermore, prioritizing infrastructure development is essential for improving the efficacy of livelihood interventions, particularly in conflict-affected areas such as the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta. Enhancing road networks, expanding access to electricity and investing in better storage facilities are vital steps to ensure that beneficiaries can fully engage in economic activities. Improved infrastructure not only facilitates market access and reduces post-harvest losses but also bolsters the overall sustainability of livelihood programs by enabling smoother operations and better resource management.

Lastly, there is a pressing need for greater coordination among humanitarian actors to streamline efforts and avoid duplication. In regions like the Middle Belt, overlapping mandates among various organizations have led to inefficiencies and fragmented aid delivery, which diminishes the overall effectiveness of interventions [20]. By fostering better collaboration and ensuring that interventions are well-aligned with local needs and contexts, humanitarian efforts can become more coherent and impactful, ultimately supporting more effective and inclusive recovery processes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Search Strategy**

Databases including PubMed, Cochrane Library, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were searched. Keywords used in the search included "Sustainable Livelihood Interventions," "Nigeria," "emergency response," "agriculture," "education," "health," and "economic empowerment."

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Studies were included if they evaluated the effectiveness of SLIs implemented in emergency settings in Nigeria; reported on outcomes related to agriculture, education, health, or economic empowerment and were published in English.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Studies were excluded if they did not focus on Nigeria or emergency interventions, lacked empirical data on outcomes and were opinion pieces or editorials

### **Data Extraction**

Data were extracted on: type of intervention (agricultural inputs, vocational training, health services). Randomized controlled trial, and cohort studies were considered.

The outcomes measured include, food security, income generation, health improvements.

### **Risk of Bias Assessment**

The Cochrane risk of bias tool was used to assess the quality of included studies. Studies were classified as low, moderate, or high risk of bias

## **RESULTS**

### **Study Characteristics**

A total of twenty studies were included, covering a range of sustainable livelihood interventions across Nigeria. The majority focused on interventions in conflict-affected areas in the northeast, with a smaller number addressing displacement in the Middle Belt and southern regions.

### **Impact of Agricultural Interventions**

Agricultural sustainable livelihood interventions, such as the distribution of seeds and farming inputs by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), have helped displaced farmers resume activities. However, studies indicate significant challenges related to land access, particularly for women, and insecurity preventing access to fields [9]. Programs promoting climate-smart agriculture (CSA) showed limited reach due to inadequate extension services. Studies have shown that Agricultural interventions improved food security in the short term but faced sustainability issues due to legal and governance barriers [11]. Also, Programs that included legal reforms to secure land rights for women showed better outcomes.

### **Economic Empowerment Programs**

Vocational training and microcredit schemes, particularly in the northeast, provided alternative livelihoods for internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, challenges related to market saturation and capital access limited their

long-term effectiveness [4]. Cash transfer programs were effective in providing short-term financial relief but did not contribute to long-term economic resilience. Reviewing Economic empowerment programs has shown that Vocational training was effective in reducing recruitment by armed groups. Moreso, cash transfer programs were helpful in meeting immediate needs but fostered dependency [13].

### **Educational Interventions**

In conflict-affected areas, educational programs, including the Safe Schools Initiative, aimed to restore access to schooling for displaced children. However, persistent insecurity and cultural barriers limited their effectiveness. Non-formal education programs had more success in reaching out-of-school children, though these were often viewed as temporary solutions. Key findings were that Safe Schools Initiative showed promise but was hindered by insecurity [16]. Additionally, Non-formal education programs improved access but lacked sustainability.

### **Health and Nutrition Interventions**

Health interventions focused on maternal and child healthcare, nutrition programs, and mental health support. Nutrition programs were successful in reducing malnutrition among children, but the reliance on external food aid raised concerns about sustainability. Health services in conflict zones were limited due to infrastructure damage and insecurity, though mobile clinics provided temporary relief [8]. The key findings were that nutrition programs had immediate positive effects, but long-term sustainability was questionable. Secondly, Health interventions were effective in reducing

mortality but were often short-term and reliant on external aid.

### **Conclusion**

While sustainable livelihood interventions in Nigeria have had positive effects, addressing systemic issues such as land rights, market access, and healthcare infrastructure will be critical to achieving long-term sustainability. Future SLIs should focus on legal reforms that guarantee land tenure for marginalized groups, particularly women. Additionally, integrating vocational training with local market needs will ensure that programs remain relevant and avoid saturation of specific trades. Finally, scaling successful health interventions like local healthcare training programs will strengthen communities' resilience in conflict-affected areas. A collaborative, multi-sectoral approach that involves local communities at every stage is essential for fostering long-term recovery and reducing dependency on external aid.

The review found that SLIs have made significant contributions to lifesaving outcomes and resilience-building in Nigeria's humanitarian crises. Agricultural, economic empowerment, education, and health interventions all demonstrated positive short-term effects, but long-term sustainability was frequently undermined by governance challenges, legal barriers, and insufficient market access.

The integration of SLIs with governance reforms, infrastructure development, and market linkages is critical for ensuring their long-term effectiveness. For instance, agricultural programs must address land tenure issues, and vocational training

should align more closely with market needs to avoid oversaturating trades like tailoring. Health and nutrition programs

should shift towards building local capacity and food systems to reduce dependency on external aid

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