

**ESCALATING RURAL VIOLENCE IN PLATEAU STATE:
CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES
FOR BASSA LGA**



POLICY BRIEF
April 2025



Executive Summary

Bassa Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State has experienced an increase in violent attacks, including mass killings, forced displacement, and destruction of livelihoods. In April 2025 alone, a series of coordinated assaults resulted in approximately 50 deaths and caused substantial property damage. These incidents are part of a larger trend of rising rural insecurity, fueled by unresolved farmer-herder conflicts, land disputes, weak governance, and ethno-religious differences.

The violence has exposed critical gaps in state response, intelligence coordination, and justice delivery. Underlying drivers include unclear land ownership, marginalisation, poverty, youth unemployment, and environmental pressures that intensify competition for resources. Communities have also highlighted rising trauma and youth radicalisation, prompting urgent calls for targeted mental health and recovery interventions.



Source: Punch Newspaper

To address these challenges, the policy brief recommends:

- Strengthening early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms;
- Supporting inclusive local peacebuilding structures;
- Conducting land audits and providing legal aid for dispute resolution;
- Enhancing support for displaced persons and rebuilding affected communities;
- Prosecuting perpetrators to combat impunity.
- These actions, coupled with coordinated state and community-led efforts, are necessary to reverse the violence and restore long-term peace and stability in Bassa LGA of Plateau State.

Introduction and Context

Plateau State, situated in North-Central Nigeria, has been a hotspot for ethno-religious violence rooted in disputes over natural resources for decades, characterized by clashes between indigenous farming communities, predominantly Christian, and nomadic Fulani herders, mostly Muslim. On the 7th April 2025, Hwrra Village, at about 8:30pm was attacked by armed assailants which resulted in the death of 3 males. Barely 24hours after the previous incident on the 8th April, 2025, the assailants launched overnight assaults on 3 communities namely Zashi of Kperie; MODACS Hotel beside college of accountancy of kwall district and Twin Hill (Gyu) of Miango district, killing 2 individuals, with others narrowly escaping. In another development, the community of Zike and its surrounding areas were attacked on 14 April 2025 by suspected armed Fulani militias. The attack reportedly resulted in the deaths of 51 people—including men, women, and children, while 10 others were said to have sustained severe injuries and are hospitalized.



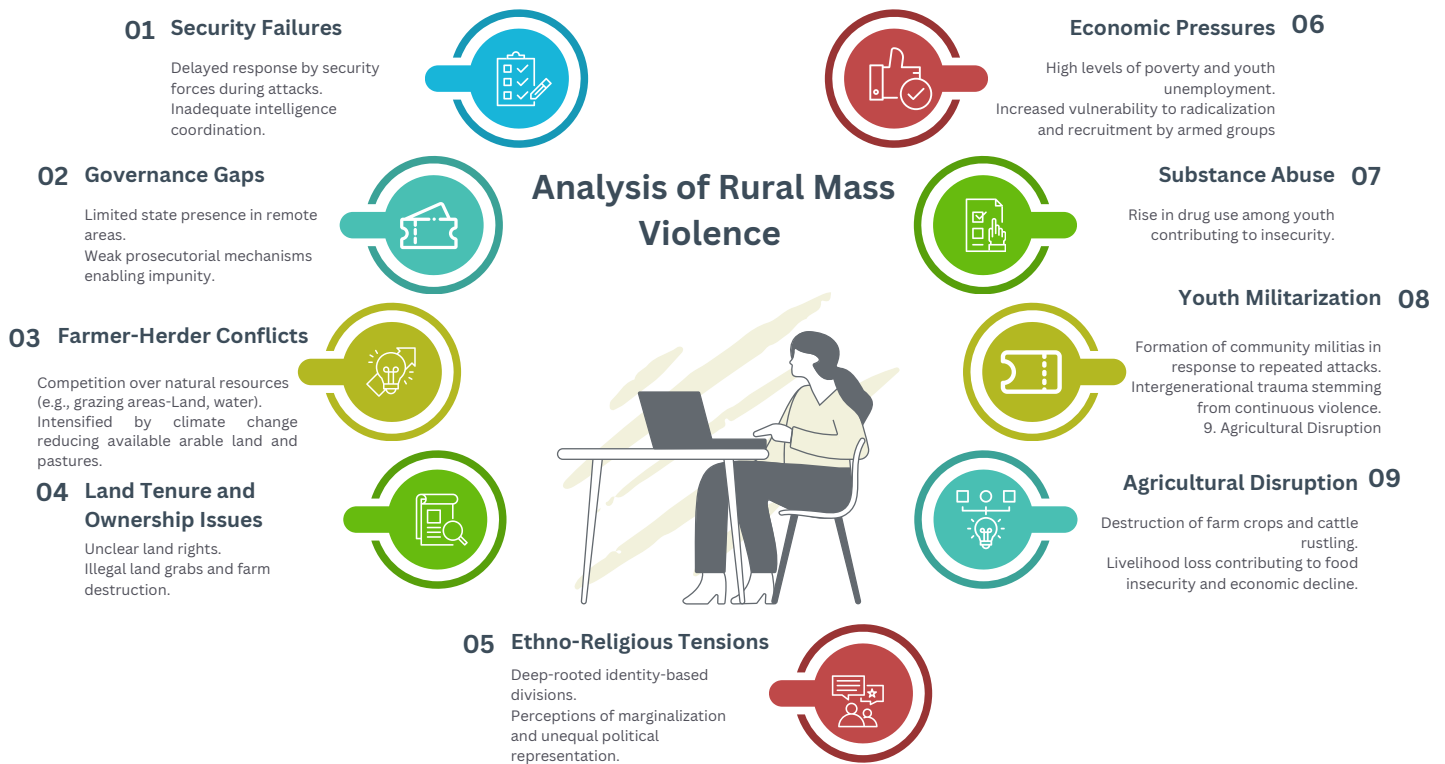
Many houses, food storages and properties were recorded to have been destroyed. These attacks came shortly after similar killings in Bokkos LGA, marking an alarming escalation in rural insecurity. Community leaders described the attack as genocidal, pointing to the strategic targeting and occupation of lands by armed groups. The Plateau state Governor Caleb Muftwang has labelled these actions as "genocide sponsored by terrorists," noting that bandits have seized over 64 communities, renaming and occupying lands in the state.

Detailed Analysis of Rural Mass Violence in Bassa LGA



The persistence of violence in Bassa LGA reflects both immediate security breakdowns and long-term structural issues. Despite security deployments, rural communities remain vulnerable due to slow response times and inadequate intelligence coordination, as seen in the April 2025 attacks where security personnel engaged invaders but could not prevent significant casualties. The evidence leans toward governance gaps, with limited state presence in rural areas and weak prosecutorial systems emboldening armed actors.

Local communities report minimal engagement from state actors, delayed responses, and an absence of justice, eroding trust and contributing to cycles of retaliation and displacement. The conflict's root causes are multifaceted ranging from farmer-herder disputes, driven by competition over natural resources which is exacerbated by climate change, reducing grazing lands and water sources, leading to violent confrontations.



Land tenure issues, including unclear ownership and illegal land grabbing- further fuel violence, with reports of farm destruction and displacement. Ethno-religious tensions, rooted in Plateau's diverse composition, contribute to identity-based violence, with perceptions of marginalization intensifying conflicts. Economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, particularly among youth, make communities susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by armed groups, as well as an increase in the usage of drugs and abuse of substances.

Youth mobilization and trauma counselling are significant, with continuous attacks radicalizing local youth, leading to the formation of defense groups “Militias” leads to inter-generational trauma. The narrative's mention of farm crops destruction, cattle maiming and killing underscores concern and the need for community-centered approaches to address these issues.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Loss of Life

The April 14 massacre in Zikke village, where at least 51 individuals were killed, has been described by community members as the "deadliest" in their history

Displacement

Continuous attacks have forced thousands to flee their homes, resulting in overcrowded and under-resourced internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.

Destruction of Property

Entire villages have been razed, with homes, farms, and businesses destroyed, crippling the local economy and food security.



Psychosocial Trauma

Survivors, including children, are experiencing severe psychological distress, with limited access to mental health services. The constant threat of violence has disrupted education and community cohesion.

Food insecurity

Disruption of agricultural activities, forcing farmers to abandon their lands due to safety concerns will affect and decreased food production and availability. This disruption has exacerbated food insecurity in the state and nation at large.



Source: Prime Time News

Policy Options and Recommendations

To address the ongoing crisis, several policy options are proposed, aligned with addressing root causes and building on past successes:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Early Warning and Rapid Response Systems

Non governmental organisation and local government and traditional council should invest in community-based monitoring while the conventional security increase surveillance for emergency communication to enhance intelligence and timely response.



Promote Inclusive Local Peace Committees

Support dialogue initiatives involving traditional rulers, women leaders, and youth representatives to bridge ethnic and religious divides. Institutionalize peace accords with legal backing to ensure compliance.

Prosecution of Perpetrators

Naming and shaming perpetrators will provide accountability and address the issues of impunity and justice to the victim.

Victim Support and Community Recovery Programs

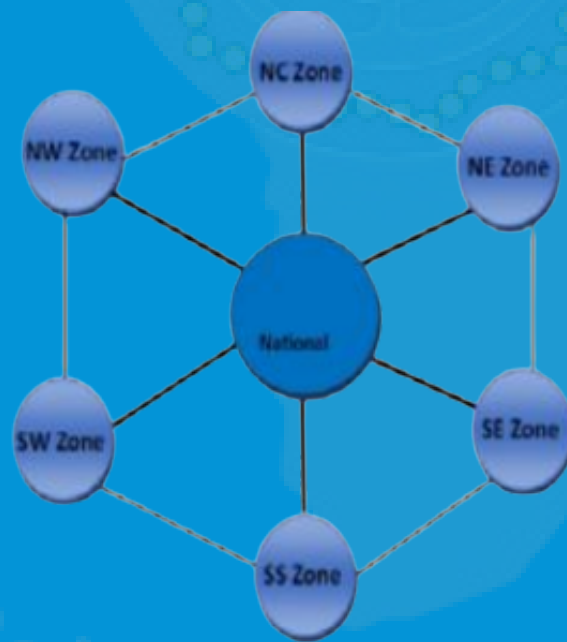
Provide emergency shelter, psychosocial support, education continuity, and healthcare to survivors, addressing trauma and displacement for displaced persons. Rebuild destroyed infrastructure and offer resettlement packages to enhance community resilience.

Land Audit and Dispute Resolution

State government should conduct land audits and clarify ownership rights to prevent speculative of takeovers which is one of the key driver of conflict. Establish mobile legal aid clinics to resolve land-related disputes and compensate displaced families, tackling tenure issues highlighted in recent reports.

About Us

WANEP Nigeria operations are structured along the geopolitical constellation of Nigeria and targets grassroots ownership of peacebuilding initiatives through its member organisations in the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Its operational framework was designed along the visions of the regional network operating in West Africa, Chad and Cameroun with ultimate goal of building sustainable peace for growth and development in the region.



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