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Assessing Community Survival Strategies for Reducing Conflict Impacts and Strengthening Resilience in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed community survival strategies for reducing the impacts of conflicts and strengthening resilience in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. The aim was to examine the coping mechanisms employed by affected communities and evaluate the effectiveness of local resilience systems in promoting peace, livelihood recovery, and social stability. A cross-sectional survey research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, interviews, and field observations from a sample of 624 respondents selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques across conflict-affected communities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that livelihood diversification was the most adopted survival strategy with 28.7 percent, followed by family and community support networks at 24.2 percent, migration to safer communities at 17.5 percent, reduction in consumption at 16.2 percent, and government or NGO assistance at 13.4 percent. Also, 59.6 percent of respondents reported that they very often or often use multiple coping strategies. Regarding effectiveness, 56.1 percent of respondents rated local resilience mechanisms as effective or very effective in promoting peace, while 54.5 percent reported high or very high levels of livelihood recovery and social stability. The chi-square result of 86.42 at a p-value of 0.000 confirmed a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes. The study concludes that community-based survival strategies significantly enhance resilience and recovery in conflict-affected areas. It recommends strengthening livelihood diversification programmes and improving community-based peace structures.

Keywords: Community, Survival strategies, Conflict impacts, Resilience mechanisms, Livelihood diversification, Social stability

Introduction

Conflict has remained one of the major threats to sustainable development, human security and community wellbeing across many parts of the world. In recent decades, communities have increasingly faced violent clashes arising from communal disputes, political tensions, environmental pressures, resource

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competition and socio-economic inequalities. These conflicts often lead to displacement, destruction of livelihoods, food insecurity, psychological trauma and weakened social structures. In many developed climes such as Canada, Norway and the Netherlands, resilience-based approaches have been adopted to strengthen local capacities, improve social cohesion and reduce the long-term impacts of conflict and disasters through community participation, social welfare systems and inclusive governance frameworks. In Africa, however, the burden of recurring communal and environmental conflicts continues to expose rural populations to severe vulnerabilities due to weak institutional responses and limited adaptive capacities. In Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, local communities continue to experience conflicts associated with land disputes, resource control, boundary disagreements and insecurity, which significantly affect livelihoods and social stability. Kenneth and Uwem (2024) observed that communal resource conflicts in Cross River State have negatively affected socio-economic development, reduced agricultural productivity and intensified poverty conditions among rural households. Similarly, Omang, Olabamiji and Bayo (2024) argued that insecurity in Cross River State has increasingly undermined peacebuilding efforts and community development, thereby requiring stronger local resilience mechanisms and non-kinetic approaches to conflict management.

The growing importance of resilience studies has shifted scholarly attention towards understanding how communities survive, adapt and recover from conflict situations. Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to absorb shocks, reorganize and continue functioning despite exposure to adverse conditions. Across developed regions such as Sweden, Germany and Australia, governments and humanitarian agencies have invested heavily in early warning systems, community preparedness programmes, social protection policies and inclusive decision-making processes to strengthen resilience against social and environmental crises.

In developing countries, especially within rural African societies, resilience is often built around indigenous coping strategies, communal solidarity, informal support systems and traditional conflict resolution practices. Gbadeyan et al. (2024) noted that local conflict management strategies among feuding communities in Kwara State played significant roles in promoting peace, strengthening social resilience and restoring community relationships. In the same vein, Bisetsa et al. (2024), in their study on South Sudan, highlighted the importance of household monitoring systems and early warning mechanisms in advancing resilience against recurring manmade and natural disasters. These examples demonstrate that resilience building is not limited to physical reconstruction alone but also involves strengthening social networks, institutional trust and adaptive capacities within affected communities.

Southern Cross River State possesses unique ecological, cultural and socio-economic characteristics that influence both conflict occurrence and community responses. The region is dominated by agrarian and riverine communities that depend heavily on natural resources such as land, forests and rivers for survival. However, increasing environmental stress, competition over resources and weak governance structures have heightened tensions among communities. The consequences of these conflicts are often severe, leading to loss of income, disruption of farming and fishing activities, destruction of homes and increased vulnerability among women and children. Uquetan, Udousoro and Ekpenyong (2025) found that women in coastal communities of Odukpani adopted diverse resilience strategies such as cooperative support systems, livelihood diversification and local adaptation measures to cope with flood hazards and environmental shocks. Similarly, Effiong (2025) emphasized the resilience of river-based livelihoods in flood-prone communities along the lower Niger River, demonstrating how local populations continuously adapt to environmental and socio-economic disruptions. Indigenous knowledge systems also contribute significantly to resilience building in Cross River State. Ogar (2023) explained that sacred forests and rivers in Abanyom communities serve as traditional mechanisms for environmental protection, social regulation and sustainability, reflecting the important role of indigenous institutions in strengthening communal resilience and survival.

Despite the growing recognition of resilience strategies in conflict-affected communities, there remains limited empirical attention on how rural populations in Southern Cross River State develop and sustain survival mechanisms in response to recurring conflicts. Existing interventions by government agencies and security institutions often focus more on immediate conflict suppression than on long-term

resilience strengthening and community recovery. This gap makes it necessary to assess the local coping mechanisms employed by affected populations and evaluate their effectiveness in reducing conflict impacts. Social support initiatives, local peace committees, traditional leadership structures, livelihood diversification, and community-based conflict resolution systems have increasingly become important tools for survival and adaptation. Ikpeme, Okorie and Ethothi (2025) noted that social work interventions and community-based conflict management approaches in Bakassi Local Government Area contributed significantly to peacebuilding and social reintegration among affected populations. Likewise, Seid (2025), in Ethiopia, demonstrated that resilience-oriented disaster risk management policies improved the adaptive capacities of pastoral communities exposed to environmental and social shocks. Against this background, this study seeks to assess community survival strategies for reducing conflict impacts and strengthening resilience in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria, to contribute to sustainable peace, improved livelihoods and stronger community adaptation capacities.

Communal conflicts, insecurity and struggles over natural resources have become persistent problems confronting many communities in Southern Cross River State, with severe consequences on human survival, livelihood sustainability and social stability. The increasing occurrence of land disputes, boundary disagreements, youth violence and communal clashes has resulted in destruction of lives and property, displacement of households, disruption of farming and fishing activities and growing fear among rural populations. In many affected communities, insecurity has weakened local economies, reduced agricultural productivity and intensified poverty and unemployment among residents. Kenneth and Uwem (2024) observed that communal resource conflicts in Cross River State have significantly undermined socio-economic development and contributed to rising hardship among local populations. Similarly, Omang, Olabamiji and Bayo (2024) noted that the growing insecurity situation in Cross River State continues to threaten peace, weaken community relationships and overstretch existing conflict management mechanisms. Despite repeated interventions by government and security agencies, many communities still experience recurring tensions and retaliatory attacks, indicating that existing responses have not adequately addressed the root causes of conflicts or strengthened long-term resilience capacities among affected populations.

Another major problem is the weak adaptive and resilience capacity of vulnerable households and communities exposed to conflict-related shocks. Most rural communities in Southern Cross River State depend heavily on natural resource-based livelihoods such as farming, fishing and forest exploitation, making them highly vulnerable whenever conflicts disrupt access to land, rivers and economic activities. The destruction of homes, crops, fishing equipment and community infrastructure often leaves victims without stable means of survival, thereby increasing food insecurity, dependency and social vulnerability. Women, children and elderly persons are usually the most affected because they possess limited access to economic opportunities, security support and recovery resources. Uquetan, Udousoro and Ekpennyong (2025) found that women in coastal communities of Odukpani experienced severe vulnerability during environmental hazards due to poor infrastructure, poverty and limited institutional support, forcing them to rely heavily on informal resilience strategies for survival. This situation reflects broader realities within conflict-affected communities where local populations are compelled to depend on personal coping mechanisms, communal support systems, and indigenous survival practices because of inadequate governmental assistance and weak social protection structures. Unfortunately, many of these coping strategies remain poorly documented, insufficiently supported, and incapable of guaranteeing sustainable recovery under prolonged conflict conditions.

Furthermore, there is inadequate empirical understanding and policy attention regarding the effectiveness of community-based survival strategies in reducing conflict impacts and strengthening resilience in Southern Cross River State. Although local communities often employ traditional conflict resolution systems, social solidarity networks, youth engagement initiatives and informal peacebuilding approaches, these mechanisms are rarely integrated into formal development and security frameworks. The absence of strong collaboration between government institutions, traditional authorities, civil society organizations and residents has continued to weaken peacebuilding efforts and reduce the effectiveness of resilience programmes in conflict-prone areas. Gbadeyan et al. (2024) emphasized that resilient factors such

as dialogue, community participation and local conflict management systems played critical roles in reducing tensions among feuding communities in Kwara State, Nigeria. However, in many parts of Southern Cross River State, these local mechanisms are gradually declining due to modern socio-political pressures, weak institutional support and increasing mistrust among communities. As a result, conflict-affected populations continue to experience cycles of violence, economic losses, social fragmentation and psychological trauma without sustainable recovery systems. The persistence of these challenges highlights the urgent need to assess existing community survival strategies, identify their strengths and limitations, and provide practical recommendations for strengthening resilience and promoting sustainable peace in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria.

Community survival strategies employed in reducing the impacts of conflicts

Abrahms et al. (2023) conducted a global study on climate change and human-wildlife conflict to examine how environmental pressures increase community conflicts and identify survival strategies used by affected populations. The study found that climate change intensified competition over land and water resources, thereby increasing livelihood insecurity and social tensions. Communities adopted strategies such as livelihood diversification, community monitoring, and collaborative resource management to reduce conflict impacts and improve resilience. The study concluded that local adaptation measures and institutional support were important for sustainable conflict reduction and recommended stronger community participation and early warning systems. Similarly, Aulia et al. (2023) examined entrepreneurial planning strategies in Jakarta, Indonesia, to assess how communities strengthened economic resilience during periods of instability. Findings showed that small-scale businesses, cooperative support systems and vocational initiatives improved household survival and reduced vulnerability. The study recommended increased support for grassroots entrepreneurship and community empowerment programmes. Evans et al. (2023) also studied coastal communities across different regions to examine sustainable blue economy strategies for reducing socio-environmental conflicts. Findings revealed that community participation in marine resource management and sustainable livelihood practices improved resilience and reduced local tensions. The study recommended stronger collaboration between governments and local communities in managing coastal resources.

Dasopang, Nasution and Lubis (2023) carried out a study in Sibolga, Indonesia, on the role of religious and cultural education in resolving radicalism-related conflicts. The study aimed to determine how cultural values and religious education could promote peace and social stability. Findings showed that community-based religious education and moral orientation programmes strengthened social harmony and reduced conflict tendencies. The study concluded that cultural and religious values were effective tools for community survival and peaceful coexistence. In another study, Diab et al. (2022) examined the use of local wisdom in conflict resolution among urban communities in Indonesia. Findings revealed that traditional dialogue systems and communal cooperation promoted peaceful conflict management and strengthened social resilience. The study recommended the integration of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms into formal peace-building frameworks. Likewise, Astuti, Dwiningwarni and Atmojo (2025) investigated collaborative interventions for reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience in Indonesia. The study found that cooperation among families, institutions and community organizations improved adaptive capacity and social support systems. The researchers concluded that participatory interventions enhanced community resilience and recommended stronger institutional partnerships and community engagement strategies.

Local resilience strategies for peace and recovery in conflict-affected communities.

Akimova, Ishchenko and Perga (2025) examined community resilience in conflict zones in Ukraine with the aim of identifying factors that promote conflict resolution and recovery in war affected communities. The study found that social trust, local leadership, community participation, and institutional cooperation were major resilience factors that strengthened recovery and peacebuilding efforts. The researchers observed that communities with strong local networks and participatory governance structures

recovered more quickly from conflict-related destruction and displacement. The study concluded that community resilience plays an important role in sustaining peace and promoting long-term recovery in conflict-affected regions. It recommended increased support for local governance institutions, grassroots participation, and inclusive peacebuilding initiatives.

Similarly, Akimova (2023) investigated local resilience in conflict-zone regions in Ukraine to identify the mechanisms communities used to adapt and recover during periods of instability. Findings revealed that local solidarity, volunteer networks and community-based support systems enhanced survival and strengthened social cohesion among affected populations. The study concluded that resilience driven approaches were necessary for rebuilding trust and improving recovery outcomes in conflict prone areas. The researcher recommended stronger collaboration between governments, humanitarian agencies and local communities to improve resilience programmes. In another related study, Castro Abril, Caicedo Moreno and others (2025) examined the relationship between wellbeing and community resilience in areas experiencing prolonged conflict. The study found that collective support systems, social inclusion and access to institutional assistance significantly improved emotional recovery and social stability among conflict victims. The study concluded that resilience is closely linked to both individual and community wellbeing and recommended policies that strengthen mental health support, social protection and community engagement.

Chavez Miguel, Bonatti and others (2022) conducted a study on environmental peacebuilding in post conflict communities with the aim of assessing how community based natural resource management could strengthen social cohesion and resilience. Findings showed that local participation in environmental management reduced tensions, promoted cooperation and enhanced peaceful coexistence among formerly divided groups. The study concluded that grassroots environmental initiatives contributed significantly to peace building and community recovery in post conflict settings. It recommended greater investment in community driven environmental programmes and inclusive resource governance systems.

Likewise, Norman and Mikhael (2023) examined the integration of peace building and resilience initiatives in conflict affected regions through the triple nexus approach. The study found that combining humanitarian assistance, development programmes and peace building strategies improved recovery efforts and strengthened community adaptation capacities. The researchers concluded that integrated resilience frameworks were more effective in addressing the complex challenges faced by conflict affected communities. The study recommended stronger coordination among governments, humanitarian organizations and local stakeholders. Furthermore, Rosvold (2023) reviewed disaster resilience in conflict affected areas to examine how armed conflicts weaken community recovery and disaster preparedness capacities. Findings revealed that conflicts destroyed infrastructure, disrupted governance systems and increased vulnerability to environmental disasters. However, communities that maintained strong local support networks and adaptive coping strategies demonstrated better recovery outcomes. The study concluded that strengthening local resilience mechanisms was essential for improving peace, disaster preparedness and long-term community recovery in conflict affected areas.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine community survival strategies for reducing conflict impacts and strengthening resilience in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. The population comprised residents of conflict affected communities in Biase, Akamkpa and Odukpani Local Government Areas, including Adim, Agwagune, Abanwan, Urugbam, Etono II, Biakpan, Uyanga, Ojor, Qua Clan and New Natam (FIG. 1,2 and 3), with an estimated population of 70,632. The study focused on household heads, farmers, traders, fishermen and other residents directly affected by communal conflicts. A sample size of 624 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula, while Bowley's proportional allocation method was used to ensure fair representation across communities. Purposive sampling was first used to select conflict prone areas, followed by simple random sampling to select respondents within each community.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, interviews and field observations, supported by secondary sources such as journals, textbooks and government reports. This combination ensured both numerical analysis and in depth understanding of community experiences. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics alongside thematic analysis for qualitative responses. This approach enabled the study to capture both measurable patterns and lived realities of how communities survive conflicts and build resilience in Southern Cross River State.

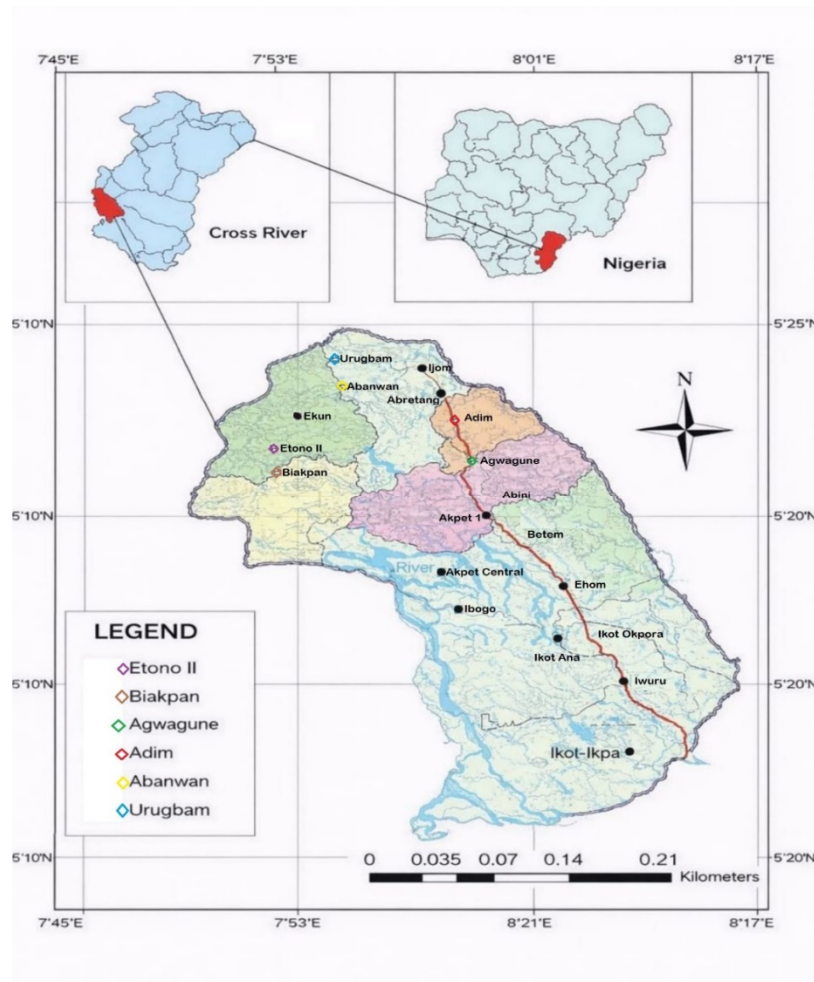


FIG 1: Map of Biase L.G.A, showing conflict-prone communities.

Source: Geographical information system laboratory. Department of Geography and environmental science University of Calabar, Calabar.

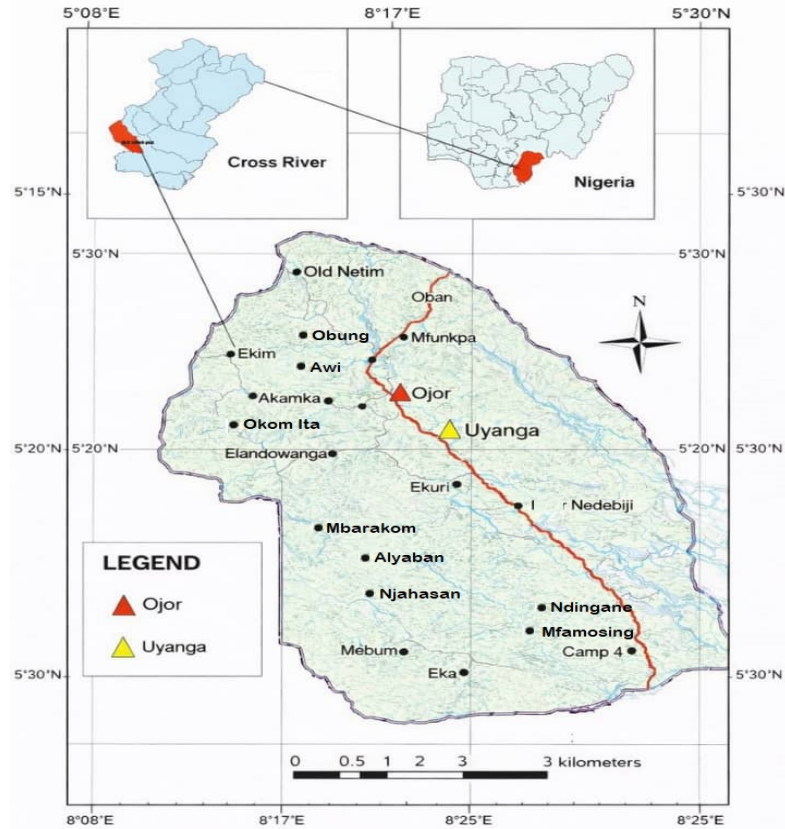


FIG 2: Map of Akamkpa L.G.A, showing conflict-prone communities.

Source: Geographical information system laboratory. Department of Geography and environmental science University of Calabar, Calabar.



FIG 3: Map of Odukpani L.G.A, showing conflict-prone communities.

Source: Geographical information system laboratory. Department of Geography and environmental science University of Calabar, Calabar.

Data presentation

Figure 4 presents the distribution of community survival strategies employed in reducing the impacts of conflicts in the study area. The results show that livelihood diversification recorded the highest proportion with 179 respondents (28.7 percent), indicating that most households rely on multiple income sources to cope with conflict pressures. This is followed by family and community support networks with 151 respondents (24.2 percent), showing the importance of social solidarity in survival. Migration to safer communities accounted for 109 respondents (17.5 percent), while there is a reduction in household consumption (101 respondents- 16.2 percent). The least utilized strategy was government or NGO assistance with 84 respondents (13.4 percent), suggesting limited external support in conflict-affected communities.

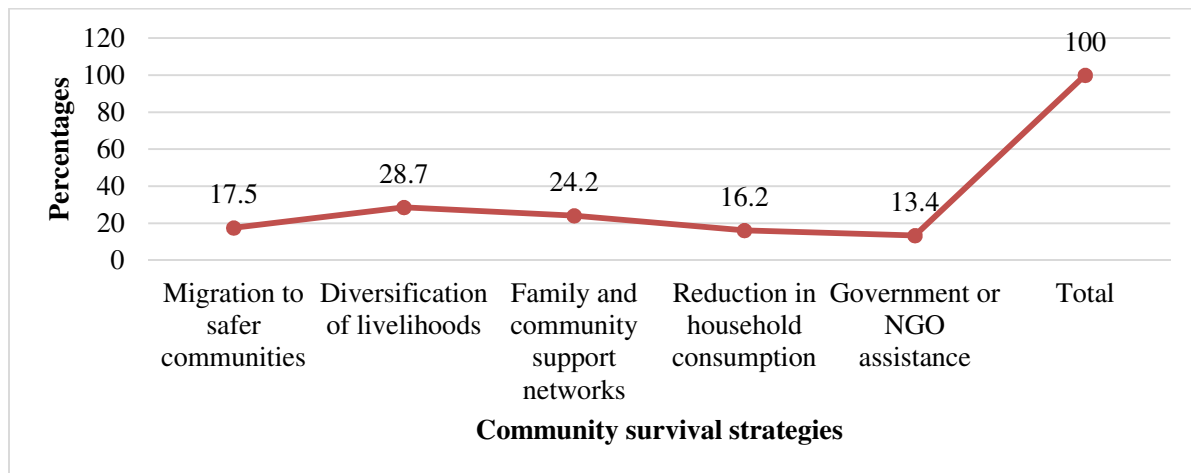


FIG. 4: Community survival strategies employed in reducing impacts of conflicts
Source: Author's research, 2026.

Figure 5 shows the frequency of use of multiple survival strategies during conflicts. The findings reveal that 201 respondents (32.2 percent) indicated that they very often use multiple strategies, while 171 respondents (27.4 percent) stated often. Those who sometimes adopt multiple strategies were 129 respondents (20.7 percent). Meanwhile, 79 respondents (12.7 percent) reported rare use of multiple strategies, and 44 respondents (7.1 percent) indicated never. This indicates that a total of 59.6 percent of respondents very often or often combine several coping strategies, showing a high dependence on multiple survival mechanisms during conflict periods.

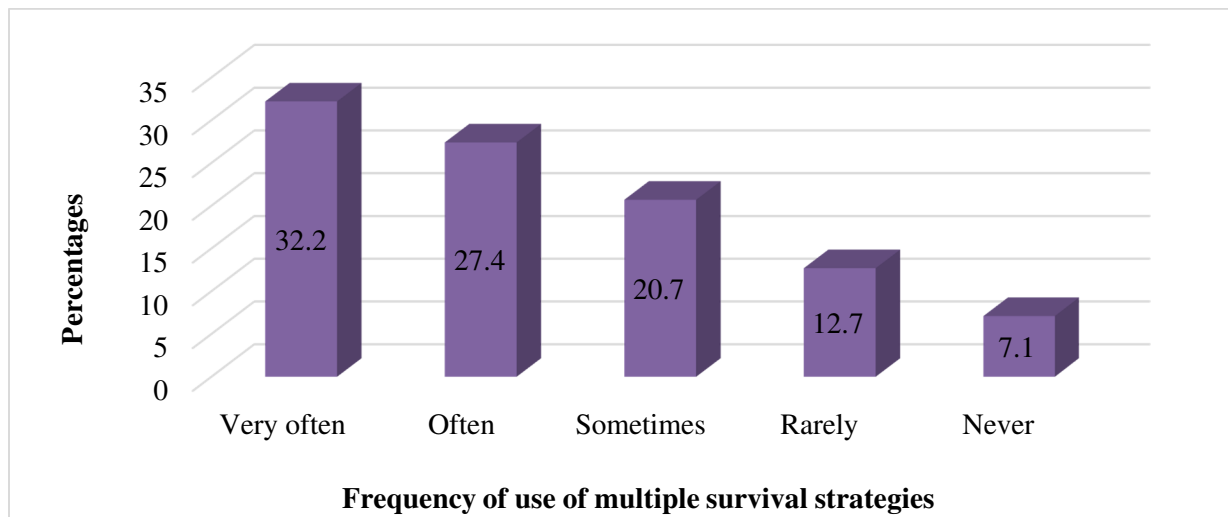


FIG. 5: Frequency of use of multiple survival strategies during conflicts
Source: Author's research, 2026.

Figure 6 shows a generally negative perception of the effectiveness of local resilience mechanisms in promoting peace within the study area. Only a small proportion of respondents, 5.4 percent (34 respondents) and 14.6 percent (91 respondents), rated the mechanisms as very effective and effective

respectively. A larger share, 23.9 percent (149 respondents), considered them moderately effective, while the majority expressed dissatisfaction, with 30.3 percent (189 respondents) rating them as slightly effective and 25.8 percent (161 respondents) stating that they are not effective. This indicates that about 56.1 percent of respondents lean towards low effectiveness categories, suggesting that local peace-building structures are not sufficiently addressing conflict challenges in many communities.

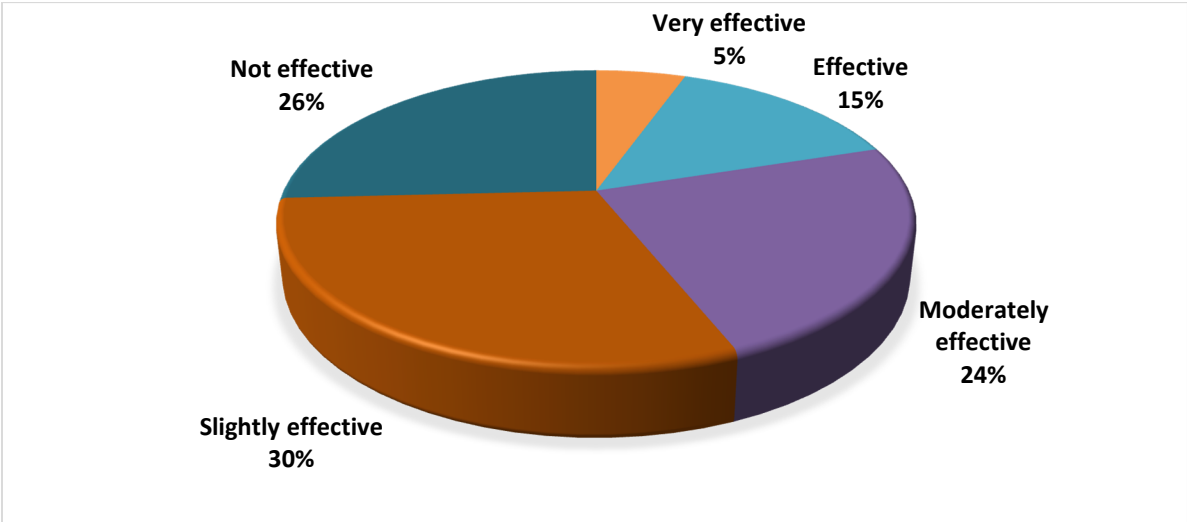


FIG. 6: Effectiveness of local resilience mechanisms in promoting peace
Source: Author’s research, 2026.

Figure 7 further shows a weak level of livelihood recovery and social stability associated with local resilience mechanisms. Only 5.4 percent (34 respondents) reported very high recovery, while 14.6 percent (91 respondents) indicated high recovery. The majority of respondents reported limited outcomes, with 25.5 percent (159 respondents) experiencing moderate recovery, 31.9 percent (199 respondents) reporting low recovery, and 22.6 percent (141 respondents) indicating no recovery at all. This means that 54.5 percent of respondents fall within the low or no recovery categories, showing that most communities still struggle with restoring livelihoods and achieving social stability despite existing resilience mechanisms.

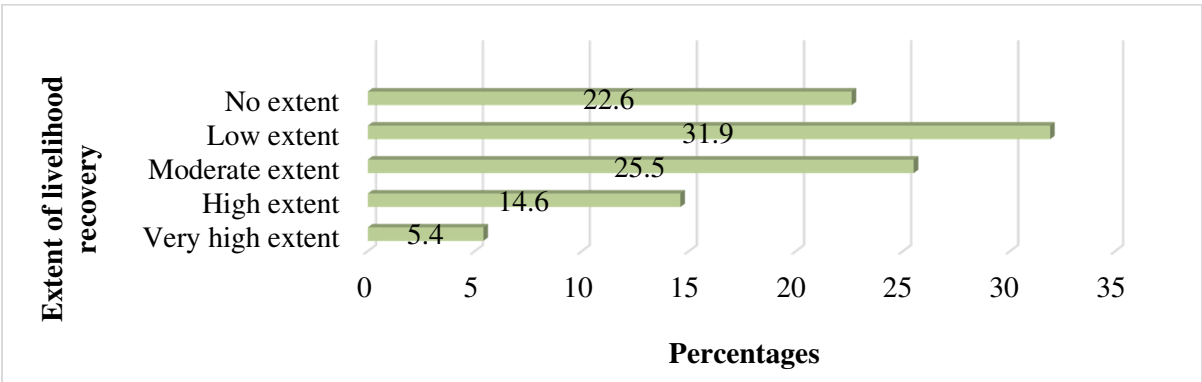


FIG. 7: Extent of livelihood recovery and social stability through local resilience mechanisms

Source: Author’s research, 2026.

Analysis of data

Test of hypothesis

H₀: Coping mechanisms employed by farmers in conflict-affected areas, have no significant impact on livelihoods in the affected areas.

The results on community survival strategies show that livelihood diversification is the most common coping mechanism with 28.7 percent (179 respondents), followed by family and community support networks at 24.2 percent (151 respondents). Migration to safer communities accounts for 17.5 percent (109), while reduction in household consumption represents 16.2 percent (101 respondents), and government or NGO assistance is the least utilized at 13.4 percent (84 respondents). This distribution suggests that most households rely more on internal and self-driven strategies such as diversification and social networks rather than external institutional support. In terms of frequency of use, 32.2 percent (20 respondents) of respondents reported very often using multiple strategies, 27.4 percent (171 respondents) often, 20.7 percent (129 respondents) sometimes, while 12.7 percent (79 respondents) and 7.1 percent (44) reported rarely and never respectively, indicating that over half of the respondents frequently depend on combined coping mechanisms during conflict periods.

The contingency analysis between coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes in Table 1 shows that out of 624 respondents, 290 experienced improved livelihoods, 195 reported no significant change, while 139 recorded a decline. Livelihood diversification contributed most to improvement with 110 respondents, followed by family and community support networks with 70, and government or NGO assistance with 55. Migration to safer areas recorded higher livelihood decline (44) compared to improvement (25), while reduction in consumption also showed relatively weak outcomes. The chi square test result further confirms a statistically significant relationship between coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes, with $\chi^2 = 86.42$, $df = 8$ and $p = 0.000$, which is lower than 0.05 level of significance, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that coping strategies significantly influence livelihood outcomes in conflict affected communities, with stronger results associated with diversification and support networks compared to migration and consumption reduction.

Table 1: Contingency analysis of coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes in conflict affected areas

Coping mechanism	Improved livelihood	No significant change	Decline in livelihood	Total
Migration to safer areas	25	40	44	109
Diversification of livelihoods	110	45	24	179
Family and community support networks	70	55	26	151
Reduction in household consumption	30	35	36	101
Government or NGO assistance	55	20	9	84
Total	290	195	139	624

Table 2: Chi square test of relationship between coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes

Test statistic	Value	df	p value	Critical value (0.05)	Decision
Chi square (χ^2)	86.42	8	0.000	15.51	Significant (Reject H_0)

Conclusion

The study concludes that community survival strategies play a significant role in reducing the impacts of conflicts and strengthening resilience in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. Findings show that households rely mainly on livelihood diversification, family and community support networks, and, to a lesser extent, migration, consumption reduction and external assistance. The results further reveal that a majority of respondents frequently combine multiple coping strategies, and over half perceive local resilience mechanisms as effective in promoting peace and supporting livelihood recovery. The statistical analysis also confirms a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and livelihood outcomes, indicating that survival strategies meaningfully influence the wellbeing of conflict affected populations.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that government and development agencies should strengthen livelihood diversification programmes through skills acquisition, agricultural support and small enterprise development to reduce vulnerability in conflict affected communities. There is also a need to enhance community-based resilience systems by supporting traditional leadership structures, social networks and local peacebuilding initiatives. In addition, stronger collaboration between government, NGOs and community stakeholders is necessary to improve access to timely assistance during conflicts. Finally, early warning systems and conflict prevention strategies should be reinforced to reduce the frequency and intensity of conflicts while promoting sustainable peace and long-term community recovery in Southern Cross River State.

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