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Impact of Forced Migration on Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Selected Communities in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

The focus of this research work was to study the impact of forced migration on the socio-economic well-being of selected communities in Benue State, with a specific focus on household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, agricultural productivity, and food security, which represent the main concerns of the study. To achieve this, a combination of quantitative research design (cross-sectional survey) and qualitative research (interviews) was adopted to investigate the impact of forced migration on the socio-economic well-being of the studied communities in Benue State, Nigeria, situated in three LGAs where such communities are most severely affected and these include Guma, Makurdi and Gwer West LGAs. A mixed design research approach was used in which primary data were generated from displaced and host households using questionnaires and interview guides respectively. Data generated were subjected to various appropriate descriptive and statistical techniques for analysis and the hypotheses were tested with regression analysis through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) while qualitative data from the interview was coded and subjected to thematic content analysis. The study found that forced migration significantly adversely affects household income and employment opportunities, leads to increase in pressure on production and consequently deteriorates food security situation and overburdened education and health facilities, which has impact on the general access to social services, among others. The study contributed directly to the empirical literature on forced migration and development by providing location-specific empirical contributions on the impacts of forced migration with the findings of the study. It also provides policy insights for development-oriented, integrated interventions towards enhancing local community resilience. Further, the study recommends improved security and other conflict prevention mechanisms such as community-based early warning systems; dialogic and peaceful mechanisms for conflict resolution; and integrated displacement recovery framework that strengthens cohesion among the displaced and host communities; and aligns security, livelihood recovery, agriculture, education and healthcare services delivery, and social protection.

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Introduction

Migration is a fundamental aspect of human history, driven by economic, social, political, and environmental factors (Salisu et al., 2026). While voluntary migration often offers opportunities for improved living conditions, forced migration occurs when conflict, persecution, natural disasters, environmental degradation, or other threatening circumstances compel individuals or communities to leave their homes (Musa et al., 2026). Forced migration has become a major humanitarian and development concern because it affects livelihoods, social relationships, economic activities, and access to essential services (De Haas et al., 2020; Ohieku et al., 2026). Globally, the increasing number of displaced persons has been linked to prolonged conflicts, political instability, and environmental challenges, making effective

responses necessary for protecting affected populations and promoting sustainable development (UNHCR, 2023).

In Nigeria, forced migration is a significant challenge, particularly in regions affected by insurgency, communal violence, farmer-herder conflicts, and environmental disasters (Jafaru et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). The Boko Haram insurgency has caused widespread displacement in the North-East, while persistent conflicts between farmers and herders have severely affected communities in the North-Central region (Omar et al., 2025). These crises have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, disruption of agricultural activities, and increased pressure on public infrastructure and social services (Zailani et al., 2025). Consequently, forced migration in Nigeria has become both a humanitarian emergency and a developmental challenge requiring coordinated government and community responses (IOM, 2022; George & Adelaja, 2022).

Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central geopolitical zone, provides an important setting for examining the socio-economic effects of forced migration. Popularly known as the *Food Basket of the Nation*, the state contributes significantly to Nigeria's agricultural production through the cultivation of crops such as yam, cassava, rice, maize, and soybeans. However, recurring violent clashes between farmers and herders, largely associated with competition over land, grazing routes, and natural resources, have threatened agricultural productivity and community stability. These conflicts have resulted in the destruction of homes and farmlands, loss of livelihoods, and the displacement of numerous households (Daodu & Igbekoyi, 2020; Alobo & Omenka, 2025).

The consequences of forced migration extend beyond displaced persons to the host communities that accommodate them. Displaced households frequently experience reduced income, food insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare and education. Similarly, host communities may face increased pressure on land, water, schools, healthcare facilities, and other public services (Abeke et al., 2025). Although the arrival of displaced populations may create some economic opportunities through increased demand for goods and services, the overall effects can be particularly challenging in rural communities with limited resources and inadequate infrastructure (Magaji et al., 2025). These conditions may intensify competition over scarce resources, weaken social cohesion, and undermine the socio-economic welfare of both displaced and host populations (Betts & Collier, 2017; Udoinyang et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025).

Socio-economic welfare in this study refers to the general living conditions of individuals and communities, particularly their economic security, access to essential services, livelihood opportunities, food security, and social well-being. Understanding how forced migration affects these indicators is important for developing appropriate policies and interventions. Although existing studies have documented the experiences of internally displaced persons and the consequences of farmer-herder conflicts, there remains a need for more systematic, community-level empirical evidence on the magnitude of these effects, particularly in affected areas of Benue State.

This study therefore examines the socio-economic effects of forced migration on host communities and internally displaced persons in selected Local Government Areas of Benue State, namely Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West. It focuses on income, agricultural productivity, food security, access to healthcare and education, and community coping mechanisms. By investigating these indicators, the study seeks to provide evidence that can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving the welfare of displaced persons, strengthening host communities, and promoting sustainable socio-economic development in Benue State.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Review

Forced Migration

The Human Security Framework, which stresses freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994), is a good way to understand how forced migration affects the economic, social, and community well-being of internally displaced persons (IDPs). It stipulates that forced migration undermines human security by disrupting livelihoods, displacing individuals from income-generating activities, and increasing reliance on humanitarian assistance, thereby exacerbating poverty and economic vulnerability (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023; UNHCR, 2025). Displacement makes it hard to get essential services like education, healthcare, and shelter, which can lead to social marginalization and competition for limited resources in host communities (Arowosegbe, 2021; Amnesty International, 2025). Forced migration also threatens the well-being of communities because it breaks up social networks, diminishes cultural identity, and makes communities less cohesive, all of which are important parts of human security (Adepoju, 2022; Muggah, 2014). From a human security standpoint, it is clear that dealing with forced migration involves more than just humanitarian relief. It also needs full policies that encourage socio-economic participation, reconstruct community structures, and make sure that IDPs are stable and resilient in the long term. According to De Haas et al (2020) Migration is a complex phenomenon that involves the movement of people across space, either inside a country or across international borders". They viewed that some migrations can be voluntary. People or families may opt to move to find better job, social, or educational possibilities elsewhere at will. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) forced migration includes a wide range of situations such as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and those who have to leave their residences because of natural or human-made disasters. The main thing that ties

all forced migrants together is that they do not choose to relocate freely; they do so because of things that are beyond their control (IOM, 2023). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024) says that forced migration is mostly about being forced to leave because of direct violence, persecution, gross human rights violations, or changes in the environment that threaten life.

Invariably, it is clear from the above that there are circumstances where people have to move, not by choice but are forced to do so with no alternative, hence the term "Forced Migration". Therefore, in my view, "Forced Migration" refers to the relocation of individuals or group of people that have no options or alternatives than to vacate their homes in search of safety and survival. This occurs when the fundamental rights of citizens are jeopardized and not when they willingly move by themselves in search of greener pastures.

Socio-Economic Wellbeing

Socio-economic wellbeing refers to the overall quality of life of individuals, households, and communities, as determined by their economic conditions, social circumstances, and access to essential resources and services (Musa et al., 2024). It encompasses important indicators such as household income, employment opportunities, food security, access to education and healthcare, housing conditions, and social inclusion (Dada et al., 2025; Muhammed et al., 2025). According to Sen (1999), human wellbeing should be understood beyond income and material possessions to include people's capabilities and opportunities to live the kinds of lives they value. Thus, socio-economic wellbeing depends not only on the availability of financial resources but also on the ability of individuals to access essential services, participate in economic activities, and achieve a reasonable standard of living (Magaji et al., 2024). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) explains that people's wellbeing is multidimensional, involving both material living conditions and quality-of-life outcomes. Material conditions include income, jobs, and housing, while quality-of-life outcomes encompass health, education, social connections, personal security, and overall life satisfaction. These dimensions are interconnected because inadequate income can limit access to healthcare and education, while poor health and limited educational opportunities can reduce employment prospects and household productivity (Ismail et al., 2024; Gabdo et al., 2025). Therefore, assessing socio-economic wellbeing requires consideration of both economic resources and the social conditions that influence people's ability to meet their basic needs.

In the context of forced migration, socio-economic wellbeing is particularly important because displacement often disrupts established livelihoods, family relationships, community networks, and access to essential services. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) may lose their homes, farmlands, businesses, livestock, and other productive assets, thereby reducing their capacity to generate income and sustain their households. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024) highlights the extensive humanitarian and developmental consequences of internal displacement, including the destruction of livelihoods, loss of housing, and increased vulnerability among affected populations. These challenges can expose displaced households to poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, child labour, and dependence on humanitarian assistance (Aluko & Magaji, 2020; Adekoya et al., 2025; Magaji & Musa, 2015; Olusola et al., 2025). Consequently, the socio-economic wellbeing of displaced persons may deteriorate when adequate livelihood opportunities, social protection, and access to public services are unavailable. Forced migration also has implications for the wellbeing of host communities. When displaced populations move into already vulnerable communities, the increased demand for land, employment, food, education, healthcare, water, and other social amenities may place additional pressure on existing resources. In agricultural communities, the arrival of displaced households can intensify competition for cultivable land and employment, while insecurity may prevent both displaced and host households from engaging in farming and trading activities. Nevertheless, displacement may also create limited economic opportunities through increased demand for goods and services, the expansion of informal businesses, and humanitarian assistance. The overall effect depends on the availability of resources, the capacity of local institutions, the level of insecurity, and the effectiveness of government and humanitarian interventions (Betts & Collier, 2017).

Communities

A community refers to a group of people who live within a particular geographical area or share common interests, values, social relationships, and institutions (Hafizu et al., 2025). Members of a community interact with one another, share resources, participate in collective activities, and develop a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility. According to MacQueen et al. (2001), community is a multidimensional concept that involves shared interests, common characteristics, social relationships, and a sense of belonging among individuals. This understanding suggests that a community is not defined solely by geographical boundaries but also by the social connections, cultural practices, and collective experiences that unite its members. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1998) recognises communities as important settings for collective participation, social support, and the promotion of health and wellbeing. Communities provide individuals with social networks, livelihood opportunities, cultural identity, and access to informal support systems. They also serve as important structures through which people organise economic activities, resolve disputes, and respond to common challenges. The strength of these relationships can influence the ability of individuals and households to withstand economic hardship, insecurity, and other social disruptions. Therefore, understanding community structures is important

when examining the consequences of forced migration and displacement.

In the context of forced migration, communities can be broadly understood as host communities and displaced communities. Host communities are the settlements that receive and accommodate people who have been compelled to leave their original homes because of conflict, violence, disasters, or other threatening circumstances. These communities may provide displaced persons with temporary shelter, access to markets, social support, and opportunities to rebuild their livelihoods. However, receiving displaced populations can also place additional pressure on existing resources, including land, water, healthcare facilities, schools, housing, and employment opportunities. The extent of these effects depends on the economic capacity of the host community, the number of displaced persons received, the availability of public infrastructure, and the effectiveness of government and humanitarian assistance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serves as the intellectual basis for this research. It uses theories about migration and development that are relevant to describe how forced migration works and how it affects people's lives and economies. The analysis is based on some key theoretical points of view; Push–Pull Theory of Migration.

Push–Pull Theory of Migration

Lee (1966) first wrote about the Push–Pull Theory, which is now one of the most popular ideas in migration studies. The theory elucidates migration as the result of the interplay between push factors: Conditions in the country of origin that compel individuals to leave, and pull factor: The conditions in the destination that entice migrants. Push factors usually include armed conflict, political persecution, lack of jobs, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and unemployment. Pull factors, on the other hand, often include safety, better job opportunities, better infrastructure, and access to education, health care, and humanitarian aid (Adepoju, 2022).

Lee's model was originally created to explain voluntary migration flows, but more and more researchers are using it to explain forced migration flows as well, since both types of movement frequently have similar dynamics (Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2018). Push factors are the most important in Benue State, Nigeria. The long-running confrontations between farmers and herders have led to widespread violence, deaths, devastation of crops, burning of villages, and loss of jobs. This widespread fear makes whole families leave their homes. Moreover, overarching issues such as poverty, inadequate governance frameworks, and insufficient state protection measures intensify displacement, forcing affected communities into vulnerable mobility (IDMC, 2022).

There are also certain pull factors that explain why people who have been displaced in Benue State choose certain places to go. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) frequently migrate into proximate host communities or IDP camps, where they believe they will find enhanced safety and where humanitarian organizations offer food assistance, temporary shelter, medical care, and educational opportunities for children (UNHCR, 2020). Some people also move to cities like Makurdi in the hopes of finding work or making new friends. The interaction of push and pull factors shows that relocation is not only a reaction, but a strategic decision-making process that is motivated by insecurity and a lack of resources (Black, Kniveton, & Schmidt-Verkerk, 2011).

Lee (1966) further underscored the significance of intervening obstacles elements such as physical barriers, instability along migratory routes, poverty, or restrictive state policies that may inhibit individuals from traveling freely, even in the presence of significant push and pull dynamics. In Benue State, intervening hurdles are things like bad roads, not enough money, and the constant threat of armed groups, which sometimes make it hard for those who have been displaced to travel great distances. As a result, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) stay within the state's borders and move to adjacent settlements instead of moving to far-off areas.

The Push–Pull Theory has been criticized for being too simple and deterministic, not fully capturing the complexity of agency, social networks, and structural inequalities in migration processes (Bakewell, 2014). However, it still provides a useful way to look at the causes and patterns of forced migration in Benue State. The theory elucidates the interplay between coercive conditions and perceived possibilities, so clarifying the reasons for human migration and the tendency to establish residence in particular locales within the state.

Empirical Review

Akseer et al. (2020), conducted a study which covered 10 conflict-affected countries, including Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, and the Central African Republic, with the objective to examine the impact of armed conflict on children's health, nutrition, and educational outcomes in conflict-affected settings. The study employed a systematic review of empirical studies and national survey data from conflict-affected countries. Quantitative evidence was synthesized to assess the effects of conflict on child wellbeing. It was found that armed conflict and forced displacement significantly disrupted access to education and healthcare among children and adolescents in conflict-affected countries, leading to poor educational attainment and adverse health outcomes. The study confirmed that armed conflict significantly reduces school attendance, increased school dropout, disrupted learning, and limits children's access to healthcare services worsened by displacement that

further leads to school closures, destruction of infrastructure, and shortages of teachers and health personnel.

Gjerløw, Karim, and Østby (2021) investigated the impact of disruptions in educational service delivery on refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to examine how the temporary withdrawal of government and international humanitarian organizations affected access to education among displaced populations and surrounding host communities. The researchers employed a quantitative research design using a novel telephone survey administered to 616 refugee and host-community households. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to compare educational service utilization before and during the lockdown. The study found that educational access declined substantially for both refugees and host communities following the suspension of formal educational services. However, refugee households were more likely to maintain some level of educational participation by relying on informal community-based, religious, and private educational providers, whereas host communities had fewer alternative learning opportunities. The study concluded that disruptions in formal educational systems disproportionately affect displaced populations and that informal educational networks play a critical role in sustaining learning during crises. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening resilient and inclusive education systems in humanitarian settings. These findings support the present study by demonstrating that forced displacement and crisis situations significantly disrupt access to education, thereby undermining human capital development among affected populations.

Betts, Chaara, Omata, and Sterck (2019) examined the extent to which Uganda's self-reliance model has enhanced the socioeconomic wellbeing of refugees and host communities. The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of Uganda's refugee policy in promoting refugees' access to livelihoods, employment, food security, and social integration. The researchers employed a mixed-methods research design, using household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews conducted among refugees and host communities in refugee settlements across Uganda. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The study found that granting refugees access to land, employment, and freedom of movement significantly improved their livelihood opportunities, household income, and food security. However, the study also revealed that refugees continued to face constraints such as inadequate productive assets, limited access to markets, and insufficient financial resources, which hindered long-term self-reliance. The authors concluded that supportive government policies, together with sustained humanitarian and development interventions, are essential for improving the socioeconomic wellbeing of displaced populations and reducing dependency on humanitarian assistance. These findings suggest that the socioeconomic outcomes of forced migration are influenced not only by displacement itself but also by the institutional and policy environment in host communities.

To buttress this, a study conducted by Bruckner and Checchi (2022), with the objective to investigate the effects of armed conflict on healthcare service delivery and population health, employed a cross-national quantitative analysis design, analyzed data from 49 conflict-affected low- and middle-income countries, using secondary data from conflict databases and global health datasets, by applying regression analysis examined the relationship between conflict intensity and health service utilization. It was found that armed conflict and forced displacement significantly reduced access to healthcare services by destroying health infrastructure, disrupting medical supply chains, and displacing healthcare workers. This confirms that conflicts significantly reduce access to maternal and child healthcare, immunization, and treatment for communicable diseases. Health outcomes deteriorate considerably in areas experiencing prolonged conflict and displacement.

In another study, Kafando (2025), who conducted an empirical study in Burkina Faso to examine the effects of terrorist violence on household agricultural production and the mechanisms through which conflict affects farming outcomes made and impressive discovery. Using nationally representative household survey data combined with spatial conflict data, the study employed econometric techniques to analyzed the impact of armed conflict on agricultural productivity. The findings revealed that violent conflict significantly reduced agricultural production by limiting access to farmland, destroying crops and livestock, discouraging agricultural investment, and disrupting farming activities. Consequently, conflict-affected households experienced lower agricultural output and increased food insecurity.

Adofu, Okwanya, Adofu, and Eraye (2024) conducted a study in North-Central Nigeria to examine the effect of conflict-induced displacement and land tenure insecurity on agricultural recovery among displaced farming households. The study specifically investigated how insecure access to agricultural land influences farm productivity and the livelihoods of returnee farmers in conflict-affected communities. A quantitative research design was adopted, with primary data collected from 854 respondents through structured questionnaires. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression techniques. The findings revealed that conflict-induced displacement and land tenure insecurity significantly reduced agricultural investment, farm productivity, and household income. The study further established that these factors constrained agricultural recovery and contributed to persistent food insecurity among displaced households. The authors recommended strengthening land tenure security and implementing targeted agricultural support programmes to

facilitate livelihood recovery and improve food security in conflict-affected communities.

A recent study by Stark et al. (2025) show that the challenges continue to persist. Their study was aimed to examine household-level patterns of self-reliance among forcibly displaced and host populations using the Self-Reliance Index (SRI), and to identify opportunities for strengthening humanitarian programmes, policies, and service delivery systems that promote sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing. The researchers adopted a secondary quantitative research design using data from 7,850 households collected by 10 humanitarian organizations across the 16 countries between 2020 and 2024. The study utilized the Self-Reliance Index (SRI), which measures household self-reliance across 12 domains, including employment, financial resources, food security, healthcare, education, housing, and social capital. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal datasets were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, with comparisons made between camp-based and non-camp displaced populations. The study found that forcibly displaced households generally exhibited low levels of self-reliance, indicating continued dependence on humanitarian assistance. Although households residing in non-camp settings recorded significant improvements in employment, financial resources, savings, and debt reduction over time, camp-based households showed minimal progress. Overall, the findings demonstrate that forced displacement substantially constrains household economic wellbeing by limiting employment opportunities, reducing financial resources, and increasing dependence on external support.

Duman and Coşkan (2023) conducted an empirical study in Turkey to examine factors influencing public support for the integration of Syrian asylum seekers and their rights within host communities. The study sought to investigate how social norms and psychological factors shape citizens' attitudes toward integration policies and asylum seekers' rights. A quantitative survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 202 residents across the Turkish cities of Bursa, Mardin, and Hatay. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings revealed that positive social norms, empathy, and inclusive attitudes significantly enhanced support for the integration of Syrian asylum seekers and the protection of their rights. The study concluded that strengthening social cohesion and public acceptance is essential for successful refugee integration and long-term social stability

Mustafa and Sa'ad (2025) examined the causes and effects of farmer-herder conflict in Benue State, Nigeria. Using conflict event data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) database together with field survey data from affected communities, the study found that prolonged farmer-herder conflict displaced farming households, forced the abandonment of agricultural land, reduced crop production, destroyed stored farm produce, and increased poverty among rural households. The study concluded that persistent insecurity poses a major threat to agricultural productivity and food security in Benue State.

Okoye, Ezeani, Onah, Ekekwe, Akov, and Agbo (2024) conducted an empirical study in Benue State, Nigeria, to examine the management of herder–farmer conflicts and their implications for internal security and access to land resources. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, involving 407 respondents selected from 10 Local Government Areas in Benue State. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The findings revealed that government land policies and inadequate conflict management mechanisms significantly contributed to the persistence of herder–farmer conflicts, leading to restricted access to agricultural land, loss of livelihoods, displacement of rural households, and heightened insecurity. The study recommended reforms in land management and conflict resolution policies to promote sustainable peace and livelihood recovery in conflict-affected communities.

George and Adelaja (2022) examined the effects of armed conflict-induced forced displacement on food security in host communities in Nigeria. Using nationally representative General Household Survey (GHS) data and an Instrumental Variable (IV) estimation approach, the study found that the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) significantly reduced household food security in host communities, as measured by the Food Consumption Score. The authors further established that displacement resulting from armed conflicts had a more severe negative impact on food security than displacement caused by natural disasters or communal violence. They attributed these outcomes to increased pressure on local food supplies, disruptions in agricultural production, heightened competition for limited resources, and delayed humanitarian interventions. The study recommended strengthening early warning systems, improving humanitarian response mechanisms, and enhancing agricultural support programmes to mitigate the adverse effects of conflict-induced displacement on host communities. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study, as they demonstrate how forced migration undermines food security and agricultural productivity in conflict-affected communities in Nigeria.

Research Gaps

The reviewed empirical studies have established that forced migration and conflict-induced displacement have significant socioeconomic consequences, particularly in relation to household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, food security, and agricultural productivity. Studies by Akseer et al. (2020), Gjerløw et al. (2021), and Bruckner and Checchi (2022) examined the effects of conflict and displacement on educational and healthcare services, while Betts et al. (2019) and Stark et al. (2025) highlighted the challenges displaced households face in achieving economic self-reliance. Similarly, Kafando (2025), Adofu et

al. (2024), and George and Adelaja (2022) demonstrated the adverse effects of conflict and displacement on agricultural production and food security. Studies by Mustafa and Sa'ad (2025) and Okoye et al. (2024) also examined farmer–herder conflicts and their implications for livelihoods and access to agricultural land in Benue State. However, despite these contributions, many of the reviewed studies focused on specific aspects of forced migration, particular displaced populations, or broader national and international settings. Consequently, there remains a need for a more integrated examination of how forced migration simultaneously affects household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, and food security and agricultural productivity within selected conflict-affected communities in Benue State.

Furthermore, a contextual and methodological gap exists in the existing literature. Although some studies have investigated farmer–herder conflicts, agricultural losses, and displacement in Benue State, fewer studies have jointly examined the economic, social, and food-security dimensions of forced migration while combining quantitative evidence with the lived experiences of displaced households and other relevant stakeholders. Evidence from countries such as Uganda, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Burkina Faso provides useful insights, but the findings may not fully reflect the unique security challenges, agricultural dependence, institutional responses, and living conditions of internally displaced persons in Benue State. The present study therefore seeks to address these gaps by examining the effects of forced migration on household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, and food security and agricultural productivity in selected conflict-affected communities in Benue State, Nigeria. By integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of these socioeconomic effects and generates context-specific evidence that can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving the welfare, livelihood recovery, and resilience of displaced households.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining a quantitative cross-sectional survey with qualitative interviews to examine the impact of forced migration on the socio-economic wellbeing of selected communities in Benue State, Nigeria. The quantitative approach enabled the collection of measurable data on household income, employment, access to education and healthcare, agricultural productivity, and food security. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quantitative research is suitable for examining relationships among variables through statistical analysis.

The quantitative component involved administering structured questionnaires to adult respondents in selected communities affected by forced migration. Data were collected between June and July 2026. The qualitative component involved interviews with community leaders, school heads, healthcare personnel, IDP camp managers, government officials, and representatives of non-governmental organisations. The interview responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring experiences and explanations of the effects of forced migration.

The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because it combined statistical evidence with detailed explanations of respondents' experiences. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while qualitative data provided additional context for interpreting the findings.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central geopolitical zone, commonly referred to as the Middle Belt. The state covers approximately 30,800 square kilometres and comprises 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission [NIPC], 2025). The study specifically focused on Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West LGAs because of their experiences of farmer-herder conflicts, insecurity, and population displacement.

Guma Local Government Area, headquartered at Gbajimba, is predominantly agricultural. Its residents engage in the cultivation of yam, cassava, rice, maize, and soybeans. However, recurrent insecurity and displacement have disrupted farming activities and threatened the livelihoods of many households.

Makurdi Local Government Area is home to the state capital and serves as an important administrative, commercial, and transportation centre. Its position along the River Benue supports trading and agricultural distribution. Nevertheless, the area has also experienced the effects of displacement, including increased pressure on housing, public infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and other social services.

Gwer West Local Government Area, headquartered at Naka, is similarly characterised by agricultural activities, with residents depending largely on farming and related occupations for their livelihoods. Conflicts and displacement have affected agricultural production, household income, food availability, and access to essential services in affected communities.

The three LGAs were selected because they provide relevant settings for examining the socio-economic consequences of forced migration in agricultural and peri-urban communities. Their experiences make them suitable for investigating changes in livelihoods, food security, access to education and healthcare, and relationships between displaced persons and host populations. A geopolitical map of Benue State showing the selected LGAs is presented as Figure 3.1.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised adults aged 18–70 years living in communities affected by forced migration in

Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West LGAs. The study included both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and members of host communities to obtain evidence from the two population groups affected by displacement.

Based on the 2022 population estimates attributed to CityPopulation.de, the combined population of the three LGAs was approximately 757,277. After excluding the estimated population below 18 years and those aged 71 years and above, the estimated population aged 18–70 was 379,272. This adult population constituted the sampling population used for calculating the questionnaire sample size.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which is commonly applied to estimate sample sizes from known populations at a specified precision level.

The formula is expressed as:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2] \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \quad (1)$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- N = study population (379,272)
- e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$n = 379,272 / [1 + 379,272(0.05)^2]$$

$$n = 379,272 / (1 + 948.18)$$

$$n = 379,272 / 949.18 = 399.42$$

The calculated sample size was approximately 399 respondents. It was rounded up to **400 respondents** to facilitate proportional allocation across the three selected LGAs.

The sample was distributed proportionately according to the adult population of each LGA, as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Population and Sample Size of Selected LGAs

Local Government Area	Adult Population	Sample Size
Guma	140,384	148
Makurdi	150,440	159
Gwer West	88,448	93
Total	**379,272**	**400**

Source: Researcher's computation based on the 2022 population estimates attributed to CityPopulation.de.

The proportional allocation was calculated using the formula:

$$n_i = (N_i / N) \times n \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \quad (2)$$

Where n_i represents the sample allocated to each LGA, N_i is the adult population of the LGA, N is the total adult population, and n is the overall sample size of 400.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West LGAs were purposively selected because of their experiences of farmer-herder conflicts and displacement. In the second stage, affected wards and communities within the selected LGAs were identified, after which eligible communities were selected for the study. In the final stage, adult respondents were selected using systematic random sampling from available sampling lists or household listings.

The selection process sought to include both internally displaced persons and host-community residents. This approach enabled the study to obtain information from different categories of affected populations while ensuring that respondents were drawn from the selected study locations.

Sources of Data

The study utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to adult respondents and interviews conducted with selected key informants. The primary data covered household income, employment, agricultural productivity, food security, access to education and healthcare, and other indicators of socio-economic wellbeing.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant institutional reports, published research articles, policy documents, and demographic sources. These included materials from the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Bank, and other relevant publications. These sources provided background information on displacement, population characteristics, and the socio-economic conditions of affected communities.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected between June and July 2026 using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaires contained closed-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and Likert-scale items designed to measure

respondents' experiences and perceptions of forced migration and socio-economic wellbeing.

Interviews were conducted with selected community leaders, government officials, healthcare personnel, school administrators, IDP camp managers, and NGO representatives. These interviews provided further information on livelihood disruptions, access to essential services, resource pressures, and community coping strategies.

Field assistants familiar with the local language and cultural environment assisted with data collection. Where necessary, questions were explained in languages understood by respondents to promote accurate comprehension. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before administering the instruments.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was supported by ensuring that the questionnaire and interview guide addressed the study objectives and the major indicators of socio-economic wellbeing. The instruments were designed to capture relevant information on income, employment, agriculture, food security, education, and healthcare.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient in SPSS version 32. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered an acceptable indication of internal consistency. The reliability coefficient obtained from the actual test should be reported in the final study.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 32. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and describe patterns in the study variables.

Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between forced migration and socio-economic wellbeing and to test the study hypotheses. The choice of regression specification depended on how the dependent and independent variables were operationalised and measured.

Qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Responses were reviewed, coded, and grouped into themes relating to livelihood disruption, food security, access to education and healthcare, and community coping mechanisms. The qualitative findings were used to complement the quantitative results and provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the study findings.

Justification of the Methodology

The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because the study required both numerical evidence and contextual explanations of the impact of forced migration. The cross-sectional survey enabled the collection of standardised information from 400 respondents across the three selected LGAs, while regression analysis provided a means of examining relationships between the study variables.

The qualitative interviews complemented the survey by capturing the experiences of community stakeholders and explaining how displacement affected livelihoods, social services, and community relationships. Combining the two approaches strengthened the breadth and depth of the analysis and provided a suitable basis for addressing the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed established ethical principles for research involving human participants, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, as outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty.

Informed consent was obtained before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding unnecessary identifying information and protecting the data collected. Particular care was taken when discussing experiences of conflict, displacement, and livelihood insecurity to minimise emotional distress and avoid exposing participants to harm.

Relevant permissions were sought from appropriate authorities, and field assistants were guided on confidentiality, respectful engagement, and the handling of sensitive information. The data were used strictly for academic purposes and stored securely in accordance with applicable ethical standards, including the American Psychological Association's (2020) ethical principles.

In summary, the methodology provided a structured approach to investigating the impact of forced migration on the socio-economic wellbeing of selected communities in Benue State. The combination of survey data, interviews, and appropriate analytical techniques was intended to generate evidence relevant to the study objectives and hypotheses.

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings in relation to the study objectives, research questions, hypotheses, the Push–Pull Theory, and relevant empirical literature. The study examined the effects of forced migration on household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, and food security and agricultural productivity in selected conflict-affected communities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Effect of Forced Migration on Household Income and Employment

The findings revealed that forced migration significantly affects household income and employment, with a

standardized beta coefficient of 0.573, a t-value of 13.816, and a significance level of $p < 0.001$. The model explained 32.8% of the variation in household income and employment ($R^2 = 0.328$). Consequently, the first null hypothesis was rejected. This suggests that conflict-induced displacement disrupts livelihoods, reduces employment opportunities, and increases dependence on humanitarian assistance.

The finding agrees with Justino (2012), who established that violent conflict destroys productive assets, disrupts labour markets, and increases household poverty. It also corresponds with Stark et al. (2025), whose findings linked forced displacement with reduced economic self-reliance and increased vulnerability among displaced households. Furthermore, the qualitative interviews revealed that many displaced residents abandoned their farms and businesses because of insecurity, while others struggled to obtain stable employment in host communities. From the perspective of the Push–Pull Theory, violence and insecurity act as major push factors that force people to leave their homes and livelihoods, thereby worsening their economic conditions.

Effect of Forced Migration on Access to Education and Healthcare Services

The second objective examined the effect of forced migration on access to education and healthcare. The regression analysis produced a standardized beta coefficient of 0.879, with $p < 0.001$ and an R^2 value of 0.773. These results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship and indicate that the model explained 77.3% of the variation in access to education and healthcare. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings indicate that displacement interrupts children's education, contributes to school dropout, and limits access to essential healthcare services. These outcomes may result from damaged infrastructure, school closures, shortages of teachers and medical personnel, and inadequate facilities in host communities. The findings are consistent with Akseer et al. (2020), who documented the adverse effects of conflict on children's education and wellbeing, and with research examining the disruption of healthcare services in conflict-affected areas. The interviews also revealed increased difficulties in obtaining medicines, accessing treatment, and maintaining children's education. The findings therefore highlight the need to restore schools and healthcare facilities and provide essential services to displaced households.

Effect of Forced Migration on Food Security and Agricultural Productivity

The third objective examined the effect of forced migration on food security and agricultural productivity. The regression results showed a standardized beta coefficient of 0.742, a t-value of 21.877, and $p < 0.001$. The model explained 55.0% of the variation in food security and agricultural productivity ($R^2 = 0.550$). Consequently, the third null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings suggest that forced migration prevents farmers from accessing their farmlands, disrupts planting and harvesting seasons, destroys productive assets, and reduces agricultural output. These conditions increase food insecurity and place additional pressure on household incomes. The results are consistent with studies by Okoli and Atelhe (2014) and Kwaghtser (2019), which associated farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt with displacement, declining agricultural production, and weakened rural livelihoods. The qualitative interviews similarly revealed that fear of attacks prevented farming and fishing, thereby reducing food availability. Although humanitarian assistance and effective support can help displaced households rebuild their livelihoods, the findings demonstrate that insecurity remains a major obstacle to agricultural recovery in the selected communities.

In line with the Push–Pull Theory, violence and insecurity compel residents to leave their communities, separating them from farmland, livestock, and other productive resources. The results therefore emphasize the importance of improving security, restoring agricultural activities, and supporting the safe return or resettlement of displaced farmers.

Qualitative Findings

Interviews with 60 participants identified three major themes consistent with the quantitative results: loss of income and employment, reduced access to education and healthcare, and declining food security and agricultural productivity. Participants reported abandoning farms and businesses, experiencing difficulties securing employment, and relying on casual labour or humanitarian assistance. They also described interrupted schooling, inadequate healthcare facilities, shortages of medicines, and increasing health challenges among displaced residents. Regarding food security, participants explained that insecurity restricted access to farmland and fishing activities, resulting in reduced production and increased hardship.

Observations from the IDP camps visited further provided contextual evidence of the living conditions of displaced households. Overall, the qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results by illustrating how forced migration affects the daily lives and socioeconomic wellbeing of affected communities.

Implications of the Findings

The findings have theoretical, policy, and practical implications. Theoretically, they support the Push–Pull Theory by demonstrating how conflict and insecurity compel people to migrate and expose them to socioeconomic hardship. In policy terms, the results highlight the need for stronger conflict prevention, improved security, and coordinated government responses to displacement. Humanitarian assistance should be complemented by long-term programmes that restore livelihoods, improve healthcare, support education, and strengthen agricultural production.

Practically, government agencies, development partners, and community organizations should provide displaced households with vocational training, employment opportunities, agricultural inputs, credit facilities, educational support, and accessible healthcare. Particular attention should be given to Benue State's agricultural communities because prolonged displacement threatens household livelihoods and agricultural production, with wider implications for food security. Coordinated interventions that combine immediate relief with sustainable recovery and peacebuilding are essential for improving household resilience and promoting socioeconomic development.

The study established that forced migration significantly affects household income and employment, access to education and healthcare, and food security and agricultural productivity in selected conflict-affected communities in Benue State. All three null hypotheses were rejected at $p < 0.001$. The qualitative findings corroborated the quantitative results, revealing widespread livelihood disruption, reduced access to essential services, and declining agricultural production. The study concludes that addressing these challenges requires effective security measures, restoration of basic services, livelihood support, agricultural recovery, and sustainable reintegration programmes for displaced households.

Summary, Conclusion And Recommendations

Summary of Findings

This study examined the effects of forced migration on the socioeconomic wellbeing of selected communities in Benue State, Nigeria, focusing on household income and employment, access to healthcare and education, and food security and agricultural productivity. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

The findings revealed that forced migration significantly affected household income and employment, with $R = 0.573$, $R^2 = 0.328$, and $F = 190.893$ ($p < 0.001$). The model explained 32.8% of the variation in household income and employment, leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis. Similarly, forced migration significantly affected access to healthcare and education, with $R = 0.879$, $R^2 = 0.773$, and $F = 1331.399$ ($p < 0.001$). The model explained 77.3% of the variation in these services, resulting in the rejection of the second null hypothesis. Furthermore, the analysis established a significant relationship between forced migration and food security and agricultural productivity, with $R = 0.742$, $R^2 = 0.550$, and $F = 478.616$ ($p < 0.001$). The third null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The qualitative findings supported these results, highlighting livelihood losses, disrupted social services, and reduced agricultural production.

Conclusion

The study concludes that forced migration has significant socioeconomic implications for selected communities in Benue State. Conflict-induced displacement disrupts livelihoods, reduces employment and household income, limits access to education and healthcare, and undermines agricultural production and food security. These consequences demonstrate that forced migration extends beyond the physical relocation of individuals to affect the economic stability, social wellbeing, and resilience of affected households.

The study therefore establishes the importance of addressing forced migration through a comprehensive approach that combines security and conflict prevention with livelihood restoration, improved social services, agricultural recovery, and sustainable reintegration. Such interventions are essential for improving the wellbeing of displaced households and strengthening community resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

Strengthen security and conflict prevention: Federal, state, and local governments should improve early-warning systems, community security, dialogue, and peaceful conflict-resolution mechanisms to prevent violence and displacement. Restore livelihoods and employment: Government agencies and development partners should provide vocational training, employment opportunities, access to credit, and start-up support to help displaced households rebuild sustainable livelihoods, and Improve healthcare and education**:** Authorities should provide accessible healthcare facilities, essential medicines, qualified personnel, temporary learning centres, teaching materials, and educational support for displaced children.

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