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The Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on the Livelihood and Food Security of Rural Households in Northeast Nigeria: A Sociological Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Rural households across Northeastern states, Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe (BAY), are living through one of the most severe livelihood and food security crises in Northeast Nigeria. The nation's recent history by March 2026, shows that 4.8 million people faced crisis-level or worse food insecurity, with lean season projections rising to 5.8 million by September, including 15,000 people in Borno State facing catastrophe level conditions. This crisis is driven substantially, though not exclusively, by a documented 2024–2026 resurgence of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Yet the sociological literature on Northeast Nigeria has been disproportionately centered on the insurgency itself, its origins, tactics, and counter-insurgency response, while comparatively little systematic attention has been paid to precisely how sustained violence reshapes the livelihood assets and food security of the rural households living through it, or to whether households exposed to structurally different violence patterns experience structurally different livelihood and food security outcomes. This study addresses that gap directly. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, Social Capital Theory, and the FAO's four pillars of food security as its analytical architecture. The study conducts a comparative multiple-case assessment of livelihood and food security conditions in three Local Government Areas (LGAs), Gujba (Yobe State), Madagali (Adamawa State), and Kukawa (Borno State), each exposed to a different insurgent violence signature that serves here as an explanatory rather than a central variable. Drawing on secondary data from humanitarian situation reports, conflict trackers, human rights documentation, and peer-reviewed literature (2023–2026), coded through qualitative content analysis, the study finds that all three sites exhibit convergent depletion of human, physical, natural, and financial livelihood capital, alongside compounding food security decline across the access, availability, utilization, and stability pillars, but that the specific composition of that decline, and the corresponding erosion of bonding, bridging, or linking social capital, differs systematically by violence type. The study concludes that livelihood and food security recovery programming in Northeast Nigeria must be differentiated by local conflict context rather than uniformly applied, and that the region's severe humanitarian funding shortfall—only 1.3 percent of 2026 food assistance requirements had been received by March 2026—threatens to entrench rather than reverse these trends.

INTRODUCTION

Rural households in Northeastern States are enduring one of the most severe livelihood and food security emergencies documented in Northeast Nigeria since the insurgency began. By March 2026, 4.8 million people across the BAY states faced Crisis-level (Cadre Harmonisé Phase 3) or worse food insecurity, including more than 600,000 already in Emergency (Phase 4); lean-season projections for June–September 2026 anticipated this figure rising to 5.8 million, with 15,000 people in Borno State alone reaching Catastrophe-level (Phase 5) conditions, the threshold associated with localized famine (OCHA, 2026). Nationally, the World Food Programme's Hunger Hotspots assessment places northern Nigeria among the small set of contexts worldwide with populations already facing, or at imminent risk of, Phase

5 conditions (WFP, 2026). Nearly 5.4 million children under five across the wider northeast and northwest were suffering acute malnutrition as of late 2024, a caseload that had risen by 23 percent in a single reporting cycle (Cadre Harmonisé, 2024). These are not abstract statistics, they describe a rural population whose capacity to farm, trade, keep livestock, and feed their households has been degraded on a scale that now rivals or exceeds the humanitarian response mobilized to address it.

This crisis has a proximate cause. Since 2024, Nigeria's security services have faced a documented resurgence of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), the movement originally known as Boko Haram, and its Islamic State-affiliated splinter, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), reversing a period of relative territorial stabilization that had followed the 2021 death

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of JAS leader Abubakar Shekau (Ayandele & Aniekwe, 2024). By 2025, Borno State's governor was warning that government forces were "losing ground" in parts of the state (Kulkarni, 2025), and by March 2026 OCHA recorded a 27 percent year-on-year increase in security incidents across the BAY states. But the insurgency is best understood here as the causal shock rather than the object of study. This paper is concerned not with the trajectory of the conflict itself, extensively documented elsewhere, but with what sustained exposure to that conflict does to the livelihood assets and food security of the rural households who must continue farming, trading, and feeding their families in its shadow.

This distinction matters because the existing literature on Northeast Nigeria skews heavily toward the security and military dimensions of the conflict (Ayandele & Aniekwe, 2024; Shalangwa & Iwuamadi, 2021) or toward aggregate, state-level measures of economic loss (Tafida *et al.*, 2023; Umar *et al.*, 2025), with comparatively little sociological attention paid to the household and community-level mechanisms by which violence is converted into livelihood and food insecurity outcomes. Neither has existing empirical work systematically asked whether households facing structurally different patterns of violence experience structurally different livelihood and food security trajectories, a question with direct implications for how humanitarian and recovery programming ought to be designed. This study addresses both gaps by comparing livelihood and food security conditions in three LGAs in three different Northeastern states, Gujba (Yobe State), Madagali (Adamawa State), and Kukawa (Borno State), each of which has experienced a distinct insurgent violence pattern during the 2024–2026 resurgence, and by asking, for each, how the insurgency has affected the five livelihood capitals of rural households; to what extent it has disrupted food availability, access, utilization, and stability; how repeated violence has altered social trust and community networks; and whether these differing violence exposures produce measurably different livelihood and food security outcomes. Violence type functions throughout as an explanatory variable, the mechanism through which livelihood and food security outcomes are produced, not as the study's subject.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empirical literature on rural livelihoods in conflict-affected Northeast Nigeria establishes the baseline this study builds from Tafida *et al.* (2023), applying a Livelihood Vulnerability Index to rural households in Northern Adamawa State, found that insurgency exposure was associated with significantly elevated vulnerability across food, health, and socio-demographic sub-components, with farming households bearing a disproportionate share of the loss. An early empirical anchor for the livelihood capital erosion this study examines directly in Madagali, Abubakar and Amurtiya (2023) characterize the insurgency's effect on rural Northeast Nigeria as

a "rural livelihood dilemma," in which displacement and loss of farmland access force households into precarious, non-farm coping strategies that undermine long term sustainable development, precisely the kind of asset-substitution dynamic the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is designed to capture. In Yobe State specifically, Alkali and Sharma (2023) document a sociological pattern of commercial contraction, market closures, transporter attrition, and the collapse of trade routes, that hollows out the informal economies rural households depend on for supplementary income, a finding directly relevant to this study's Gujba case.

On the food security dimension, Ibe *et al.* (2025), in a mixed-methods study of Borno and Yobe States spanning 2013 to 2022, found that displacement and infrastructural destruction were the key drivers of food scarcity, and that the insurgency had profoundly undermined food availability, with cascading effects on access, nutrition, and long-term system stability, precisely the four-pillar cascade this study traces across its own three cases. Their finding that Yobe State exhibited more severe food security vulnerabilities than Borno State, despite Borno being the conflict's historical epicenter, cautions against assuming that raw conflict intensity, rather than the interaction of violence type with local humanitarian infrastructure, is the primary determinant of household food security outcomes. Agwu (2023) extends this line of inquiry by testing whether household resilience capacity mediates the relationship between conflict exposure and food insecurity, concluding that resilience capital, while beneficial, is insufficient on its own to offset the compounding effects of repeated shocks, a conclusion consistent with the cumulative capital depletion this study documents across all three LGAs. Badewa and Dinbabo (2023) argue for multisectoral, regionally differentiated food security interventions rather than uniform humanitarian responses, a position this study's cross-case comparison substantiates empirically. Eke-okocha and Eze (2023) similarly trace a food insecurity trajectory across Northeast Nigeria in which shocks compound rather than simply add, consistent with the pattern Ibe *et al.* (2025) identify.

A second body of literature examines the sociological, rather than purely economical dimensions of livelihood disruption, principally through the lens of social capital and displacement. Kamta and Scheffran (2022), applying social network analysis to internally displaced communities in the Lake Chad region, find that displacement restructures social networks in ways that can generate friction with host communities even as it creates new, often weaker, ties, a dynamic with direct bearing on this study is the Kukawa case. Kolade *et al.* (2019) trace a related transformation among displaced populations in Northeast Nigeria, documenting a shift from high-bonding, high-homogeneity pre-displacement networks toward more diffuse bridging and linking capital after displacement, a transformation that can support livelihood recovery through entrepreneurship

but only where host communities and institutions are receptive. Roberts and Lawanson (2022) and Yusuf and Samuel (2025), examining Nigerian cities and Benue State respectively, both document measurable declines in inter-group trust and cooperative capacity following displacement, reinforcing Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (2000) claims that social capital, once eroded, is not readily restored. Shalangwa and Iwuamadi's (2021) qualitative case study of Madagali LGA itself offers the most direct empirical precedent for this study's Madagali findings, documenting both a collapse of farming access due to fear of attack and a parallel collapse of intra-community trust, evidence that livelihood and social erosion proceed together rather than as separate processes.

A third strand situates these dynamics within gender and welfare-systems perspectives relevant to how livelihood recovery should be designed. Elice *et al.* (2023) find that displacement produces mixed effects on women's economic agency, eroding customary livelihood bases while, in some displaced settings, expanding women's market access and income-generating activity, a tension with direct implications for gender-responsive livelihood programming across this study's three sites. Diwakar *et al.* (2026), examining insecurity, livelihoods, and welfare across Northern Nigeria, situate livelihood recovery within the broader state of the social protection architecture, arguing that recovery in conflict-affected LGAs cannot be separated from whether that wider welfare system functions, a claim this study's Kukawa findings substantiate directly. Otekunrin (2025) frames conflict, hunger, and poverty across Africa as a mutually reinforcing triad, a framing this study's discussion returns to in assessing the region's chronic funding shortfall.

Despite this substantial body of work, no existing study has undertaken a systematic comparative analysis of livelihood and food security outcomes across LGAs experiencing structurally different patterns of insurgent violence. This study addresses that gap directly, treating the insurgency's violence pattern as an explanatory variable in service of understanding livelihood and food security outcomes, rather than as the object of inquiry itself.

Theoretical Framework

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The study's primary theoretical anchor is the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), developed by Chambers and Conway (1992) and refined by Scoones (1998) and Ellis (2000). The SLF conceptualizes livelihoods in terms of five capital assets, human (labor, skills, health), social (networks, trust, reciprocity), physical (infrastructure, tools, shelter), natural (land, water, forest and fishery resources), and financial (savings, credit, remittances, market access), and examines how external shocks, in this study's case, insurgent violence, erode or transform household access to these assets. This framework structures the entirety of the study's findings section, which for each case systematically traces impact across

all five capitals rather than treating livelihood loss as an undifferentiated byproduct of conflict.

Social Capital Theory

To sharpen the sociological dimension of the analysis, the study draws on Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), which conceptualizes social capital as the networks, trust, and reciprocal relationships that enable collective action, and which this study treats as a livelihood capital in its own right rather than a peripheral concern. Following the tripartite distinction common in the Nigerian displacement literature (Kamta & Scheffran, 2022; Kolade *et al.*, 2019), the analysis distinguishes bonding capital (trust and reciprocity within a community), bridging capital (relationships across communities or social groups, such as between farmers and traders, or between host and displaced populations), and linking capital (vertical relationships with formal institutions, including government, security forces, and humanitarian agencies). This lens is applied to examine how the erosion of each form of social capital, in turn, constrains household livelihood strategies and food access.

Food Security Framework

The food security dimension of the study, its second core analytical pillar alongside livelihoods, is organized around the FAO's four pillars: availability (adequacy of food supply through production or import), access (economic and physical capacity to obtain food), utilization (nutritional quality and the biological capacity to benefit from food, dependent on health, water, and sanitation), and stability (resilience of the first three pillars against shocks over time). This framework structures the food security analysis presented for each case and in the cross-case comparison. Sen's (1981) entitlement approach supplements this framework by directing attention to households' collapsing exchange entitlements, their capacity to convert labor, assets, or production into food, rather than assuming food insecurity results solely from aggregate supply shortfalls; this entitlement lens is what allows the study to connect livelihood capital loss (Section 3.1) directly to food security outcomes (this section) rather than treating them as parallel but unconnected findings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

Given that this study relies exclusively on secondary, desk-based data rather than primary field surveys, precluded by active security constraints in all three study sites, the research adopts a Comparative Multiple-Case Study Design (Yin, 2018), treating livelihood and food security conditions in Gujba, Madagali, and Kukawa LGAs as three bounded cases. This design allows systematic cross-case comparison of livelihood and food security outcomes without requiring primary data collection, while using each site's documented violence pattern as a structuring, explanatory variable.

Case Selection

The three LGAs were purposively selected to represent one state each within the core Northeast Nigeria conflict zone (Yobe, Adamawa, Borno) and to hold constant a rural, farming and herding dependent economic base while varying the type of insurgent violence experienced during the 2024–2026 resurgence, thereby isolating violence type as the study's explanatory variable for observed differences in livelihood and food security outcomes. Gujba LGA, Yobe State, has experienced a sustained pattern of military target ambushes along a transit corridor. Madagali LGA, Adamawa State, has experienced chronic, repeated raiding of farming communities. Kukawa LGA, Borno State, is anchored by a single mass casualty, mass abduction event embedded within a wider pattern of Borno State territorial regression. Full incident level detail for each site is documented in Section 5 only insofar as it establishes the exposure pathway through which livelihood and food security outcomes were produced.

Data Sources

Data were drawn from six categories of secondary sources, following the study's original research plan: conflict and incident tracking data (ACLED); humanitarian and food security data (UN OCHA situation reports, WFP and Cadre Harmonisé food insecurity classifications); human rights and protection reporting (Human Rights Watch); verified news reporting, cross-referenced against multiple outlets given documented misinformation on this topic; government and institutional communications; and peer-reviewed academic literature. Consistent with the study's livelihood and food security focus, humanitarian and food security data sources were treated as the primary evidentiary base, with conflict tracking and news sources used to establish the exposure pathway (violence type, timing, and location) rather than as the analytical center of gravity.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) adapted for documentary rather than interview-based data, following the thematic coding logic of Braun and Clarke (2006). Collected documents were coded primarily against the SLF's five capital categories and the FAO's four food security pillars, with a secondary code applied to identify the dominant violence exposure pathway (military target, chronic civilian raid, or mass-casualty event) linking each documented livelihood or food security outcome to its proximate cause. Findings were then compared thematically across the three case sites.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study restricted itself to sources dated 2023–2026 to capture the documented resurgence period, and required a minimum of two-source corroboration for any specific incident, casualty figure, or displacement statistic cited.

Priority was given to primary humanitarian and data sources (OCHA, Cadre Harmonisé, WFP) over news narrative for quantitative claims; news sources were used primarily for chronology and local context. Tertiary aggregator sources were used only to locate primary sources and are not cited directly. Advocacy and faith-based reporting on Madagali, which frames the LGA's raids as disproportionately targeting Christian farming communities, is treated as supplementary corroboration rather than a primary evidentiary basis, in keeping with the study's commitment to an academically neutral tone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gujba, Yobe State

Violence exposure pathway

Gujba LGA sits astride the Damaturu-Biu highway and the Buni Yadi corridor, a strategic transit and military logistics axis that has made it a recurring target of attacks aimed primarily at security installations and travelers rather than farming settlements. Between late 2023 and mid-2026, the LGA recorded a near continuous sequence of ambushes on military convoys, bases, and brigades along this corridor, most recently a May 2026 coordinated assault on the Army Special Forces School at Buni Yadi and, as recently as 26 March 2026, an improvised explosive device that killed one traveler and injured fifteen others returning from Goniri Market (OCHA, 2026).

Livelihood capital erosion

The corridor focused nature of Gujba's violence exposure produces a livelihood impact that is disproportionately concentrated in physical and financial, rather than natural capital. OCHA (2026) documents the burning of health facilities, protection centers, and humanitarian warehouses in Buni Gari, alongside repeated disruption of the Damaturu–Gujba corridor that serves as the vital access route for humanitarian operations across Gujba and neighboring Gulani LGA; this represents a direct loss of the physical infrastructure, markets, warehouses, clinics, passable roads, that rural livelihoods in a transit economy depend on. Because farmland itself is rarely the direct target, Gujba's natural capital has been comparatively less degraded than Madagali's or Kukawa's; the more consequential loss is financial and social. Alkali and Sharma's (2023) sociological analysis of Yobe State's commercial contraction documents how repeated attacks on transit routes generate a chilling effect on commercial mobility that extends well beyond the blast radius of any single ambush, discouraging traders and transporters from servicing rural markets. For Gujba's households, this narrows financial capital directly: fewer buyers reach local markets, fewer input suppliers extend credit, and the informal trade and remittance channels that ordinarily supplement farm income contract. This local contraction compounds a national trend: headline food inflation reached 16.96 percent in May 2026, a 5.6 percentage point jump from the previous month alone (WFP, 2026), meaning that even the reduced volume

of goods still reaching Gujba's markets costs rural households a growing share of an already diminished income. This is compounded by human capital loss, as the closure of health facilities documented by OCHA (2026) reduces the working age labor, which pool's capacity to remain economically productive, and by social capital loss specifically in its bridging form: the horizontal ties connecting Gujba's farming and trading households to the wider regional economy, market towns, transporters, and input suppliers, are the capital asset most directly severed by corridor violence.

Food security implications

Because the primary shock is to exchange infrastructure rather than to farmland, Gujba's food security profile is dominated by the access and stability pillars rather than availability. Ibe *et al.*'s (2025) finding that Yobe State exhibits more severe food security vulnerabilities than Borno despite lower absolute conflict intensity is directly instructive; with humanitarian infrastructure sparser in Yobe and, per OCHA (2026), food assistance in 2026 having reached zero beneficiaries in Yobe State to date, Gujba's households have markedly less capacity to absorb corridor disruptions than better-served Borno LGAs. The result is a food security trajectory defined less by a catastrophic single-event collapse in production than by chronic, cumulative attrition of the access channels, markets, credit, transport, through which rural households normally convert their labor and assets into food, precisely the erosion of exchange entitlements Sen (1981) identifies as a driver of food insecurity independent of aggregate supply.

Madagali, Adamawa State

Violence exposure pathway

Madagali LGA, in Adamawa State's northern senatorial zone, has experienced a markedly different exposure pathway: repeated, sustained raiding of farming settlements rather than military infrastructure. Between October 2025 and April 2026 alone, the LGA recorded five documented assaults on farming villages, including Kirchinga (the state governor's home village, twice attacked), Dar, and Yinagu, collectively killing dozens of residents, razing homes, and looting livestock, consistent with the pattern of farming-community raiding Shalangwa and Iwuamadi (2021) document in the same LGA.

Livelihood capital erosion

Of the three cases, Madagali shows the most direct erosion of natural and human capital. Shalangwa and Iwuamadi's (2021) qualitative case study, based on key informant interviews and focus group discussions, found that "farming, which is the main stay of the local economy, has been the worst hit because most people cannot access their farms due to the fear of being kidnapped or killed," restricting cultivation to a narrow radius around the LGA headquarters at Gulak. This is natural capital erosion mediated through fear rather

than physical destruction of farmland, compounded by human capital loss as farm labor becomes too dangerous to deploy and, per Shalangwa and Iwuamadi (2021), local schools, courts, and health posts have been abandoned entirely, undermining both the present labor force and the human capital of the next generation. Financial capital has been degraded through repeated livestock rustling, a direct asset loss for herding households, and through a local economy that Shalangwa and Iwuamadi (2021) describe as effectively divided between insurgent and military control, leaving ordinary households with markedly reduced access to income generating activity of any kind. Most distinctively, Madagali's social capital erosion is concentrated in its bonding form: repeated raiding has exploited pre-existing social fractures within Madagali's communities, generating a crisis of interpersonal trust so severe that, per one respondent, "no one knows who to trust." Because bonding capital, the mutual trust and reciprocity that allow neighbors to share labor, lend tools, or extend informal credit, is itself a livelihood resource in rural farming communities, its collapse compounds the direct natural and human capital losses documented above, leaving households unable even to pool the diminished resources they retain.

Food security implications

Madagali's food security profile is dominated by the availability and utilization pillars rather than access alone. With farming restricted to a narrow, militarized perimeter and livestock subject to repeated rustling, local food production capacity has been directly curtailed rather than merely disrupted in distribution, a distinction that separates Madagali's profile from Gujba's access-driven crisis. Faith-based advocacy reporting on Madagali, used here only as supplementary corroboration, frames the Kirchinga and Yinagu attacks as disproportionately affecting Christian farming households; independent of that framing, mainstream reporting on the repeated village level targeting corroborates that Madagali's violence concentrates on farming settlements specifically, reinforcing the direct production side food security impact documented in the qualitative case study literature.

Kukawa, Borno State

Violence exposure pathway

Kukawa LGA, on the shores of Lake Chad in Borno State, has experienced a third exposure pathway: an episodic but catastrophic mass casualty and mass abduction event, embedded within a wider pattern of Borno State territorial regression. On 15 May 2025, gunmen from a JAS faction rounded up more than 100 residents, mostly bean farmers and fishermen, in the villages of Mallam Karamti and Kwatandashi; 57 bodies were recovered two days later and roughly 70 people remain missing (Human Rights Watch, 2026; Kulkarni, 2025). Reporting corroborated across Human Rights Watch and independent news accounts indicates the attack was retaliatory, villagers were targeted for paying protection money to the rival ISWAP faction

(Kulkarni, 2025).

Livelihood capital erosion

Kukawa's livelihood impact is distinguished from the other two cases by its concentration in human capital: the abduction and killing of a substantial share of the working-age population of two villages represents a near-total loss of the labor force on which those villages' livelihoods depended, a magnitude of human capital loss neither Gujba's corridor disruption nor Madagali's fear restricted access produces in a single event. Natural capital is likewise directly affected, as the targeted occupations, bean farming and Lake Chad fishing, are themselves the primary means of converting the LGA's land and water resources into household income and food. The Borno State government's policy of closing IDP camps and compelling displaced residents to return to areas that remain insecure, identified by Human Rights Watch (2026) as a contributing factor in Kukawa's vulnerability, represents a distinct erosion of linking capital. The vertical relationship between rural households and the state institutions seemingly responsible for both their protection and their livelihood support, since the same authority mandating returns is simultaneously unable to guarantee the security of the areas to which households are returned. This rupture of linking capital is Kukawa's most sociologically distinctive finding, and it compounds rather than substitutes for the natural and human capital losses described above, since households cannot rebuild livelihoods around land and labor they no longer safely possess while also lacking a functioning institutional channel through which to seek redress or support.

Food security implications

Kukawa's food security consequences are the most severe of the three cases on the availability pillar specifically: the deliberate targeting of farmers and fishermen, combined with the abduction of a substantial share of two villages' working-age population, represents a near-total, localized collapse of productive capacity rather than the partial curtailment seen in Madagali or the access channel disruption seen in Gujba. This localized catastrophe sits within a wider state level crisis: Borno State is projected, per OCHA (2026), to see 15,000 people reach Catastrophe-level (Cadre Harmonisé Phase 5) food insecurity by the June–September 2026 lean season. The convergence of mass casualty violence, camp closure policy, and catastrophic level regional food insecurity marks Kukawa as the case in which food availability, the pillar most directly tied to local production capacity, has collapsed most completely.

Cross-Cutting: Health, Nutrition, and the Utilization Pillar

Across all three LGAs, the livelihood and food security outcomes documented above are compounded by a regional health and nutrition crisis that most directly implicates the FAO's utilization pillar, the biological

capacity of households to derive nutritional benefit from the food they do obtain, regardless of how much food access or availability they retain. Cadre Harmonisé (2024) data estimated that nearly 5.4 million children under five across northeast and northwest Nigeria were suffering acute malnutrition, comprising roughly 1.8 million cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition and 3.6 million of Moderate Acute Malnutrition, alongside some 787,000 acutely malnourished pregnant and breastfeeding women; the caseload requiring treatment had risen by 23 percent since the prior assessment period, with Severe Acute Malnutrition cases specifically rising by 69 percent. By March 2026, this nutritional crisis was compounding with a wave of communicable disease outbreaks across the BAY states: Borno State recorded 1,151 suspected measles cases in the first weeks of January 2026, concentrated among under-five children with incomplete immunization histories, alongside 1,490 suspected diphtheria cases and 11 associated deaths between January and March; Adamawa recorded a further 194 suspected acute watery diarrhea cases and 25 suspected diphtheria cases with 8 deaths over the same period (OCHA, 2026). For households in Gujba, Madagali, and Kukawa alike, this means that even where food access is partially maintained, through humanitarian assistance, informal exchange, or residual production, the utilization pillar remains severely compromised by a health system OCHA (2026) describes as “already weakened” by conflict related access constraints and funding shortfalls, converting food insecurity into malnutrition at a substantially higher rate than food quantity data alone would predict, and underscoring that livelihood and food security recovery cannot be addressed through food and income interventions alone without parallel investment in health and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems.

Cross-Case Comparative Discussion

Read together, the three cases substantiate the study's central proposition: that the specific composition of livelihood and food security decline in insurgency affected Northeast Nigeria is shaped by the type of violence households are exposed to, not merely its frequency or intensity, and that violence type must therefore be treated as an explanatory variable in livelihood and food security research rather than collapsed into a single undifferentiated conflict exposure measure. Across all three LGAs, human, physical, and natural capital were degraded, and food access and stability were compromised by market disruption and displacement. But the composition of that decline diverged sharply. Gujba's households face a predominantly financial and physical capital crisis, mediated through the collapse of transit corridor commerce, with a correspondingly access and stability dominated food security profile even where farmland itself remains cultivable. Madagali's households face a predominantly natural and human capital crisis, as fear restricted farming access and livestock loss curtail local production directly, with a correspondingly availability

and utilization dominated food security profile. Kukawa's households face the most acute human capital and linking capital crisis of the three, compounded by the near-total loss of a working age productive cohort and a rupture in state protection, producing the most severe availability pillar collapse of the three cases, within a state level context sliding toward Catastrophe-level conditions.

This differentiation carries direct implications for how food security data at the LGA level should be interpreted. A uniform regional statistic, such as the 4.8 million BAY-states residents facing Crisis-level or worse food insecurity by March 2026 (OCHA, 2026), obscures the fact that this aggregate figure is produced by at least three distinct causal pathways: exchange entitlement collapse in corridor violence contexts, production entitlement collapse in chronic raiding contexts, and simultaneous labor force and institutional protection collapse in mass casualty contexts. The region-wide funding shortfall documented by OCHA (2026), only 1.3 percent of the US\$224.4 million required for 2026 food assistance had been received by March, with livelihood support programming reaching just 6 percent of its target population, compounds all three pathways simultaneously: households whose livelihood capital has already been eroded, through whichever mechanism, are also losing access to the humanitarian transfers that might otherwise substitute for that lost capital, a double deprivation consistent with Sen's (1981) entitlement framework, in which both production-based and exchange-based (transfer) entitlements collapse concurrently.

The 900,000 plus internally displaced people still resident in over 200 sites across the BAY states as of March 2026, amid severe overcrowding, deteriorating shelter, and rising fire risk (OCHA, 2026), represent a further cross cutting dimension not fully captured by the LGA specific case narratives: displacement itself, as Kamta and Scheffran (2022) and Kolade *et al.* (2019) document, restructures the social capital on which livelihood recovery depends, generating friction with host communities even as it opens new, if not weaker, network ties. The Borno State government's camp closure and return policy, identified by Human Rights Watch (2026) as a contributing factor in Kukawa's vulnerability specifically, illustrates how state action intended to demonstrate stabilization can, where security conditions have not in fact stabilized, actively undermine both the natural capital (safe land access) and linking capital (institutional protection) that durable livelihood recovery requires.

A gendered dimension cuts across all three cases as well. OCHA (2026) documents that women, children, and farmers are increasingly and specifically targeted across the BAY states, most visibly in a March 2026 attack in Gwoza LGA in which hundreds of women and children were abducted. Yet Elice *et al.*'s (2023) finding that displacement can paradoxically expand women's market access and income-generating activity outside customary constraints suggests that livelihood recovery programming should not treat women in these communities solely as

a vulnerable category requiring protection, but also as agents whose economic roles may be reconfigured, for better and worse, by the very disruption the insurgency causes, a tension with direct relevance to how financial and human capital rebuilding programs are designed and targeted in Gujba, Madagali, and Kukawa alike.

Existing livelihood support programming, though reaching only a fraction of the target population, offers a template for what capital specific recovery can look like. WFP's May 2026 operations in Borno and Yobe combined an electronic voucher general food assistance modality, reaching 703,698 people, with targeted financial and human capital rebuilding such as: 324 farmers in Jigawa and Yobe States received training in agricultural practices, financial literacy, collective marketing, and post-harvest handling, while 96 livestock farmers received business-development training covering cost and profit analysis and market engagement (WFP, 2026). This kind of paired transfer-plus-skills intervention is consistent with the SLF's emphasis on rebuilding multiple capitals simultaneously rather than substituting cash for lost assets alone, and it offers a partial model for the Gujba specific financial capital and Madagali specific natural capital interventions this study's findings suggest are needed, even as its current scale, a few hundred farmers against a rural population in the hundreds of thousands, falls far short of documented need.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings suggest that livelihood and food security interventions calibrated to a single, uniform theory of insurgency impact are likely to underperform across Northeast Nigeria's varied conflict micro-geographies, a conclusion consistent with Badewa and Dinbabo's (2023) call for regionally differentiated resilience praxis. In corridor violence contexts such as Gujba, interventions should prioritize the restoration of market access, transport security, and trader and transporter credit networks, over farm level input support alone, since the primary constraint is exchange rather than production. In chronic civilian raiding contexts such as Madagali, interventions should prioritize secured, escorted farmland access and livestock recovery support alongside community level trust building and reconciliation processes, potentially informed by the dialogue mechanisms Shalangwa and Iwuamadi (2021) find some community actors already willing to consider, since natural and bonding capital restoration must proceed together. In mass casualty contexts such as Kukawa, the priority is livelihood support targeted specifically at the occupational cohorts, farmers and fishermen, whose loss most directly drives local food insecurity, paired with a credible restoration of linking capital, sustained state protection prior to any camp closure or return policy, rather than after. Across all three contexts, the utilization pillar findings in Section 5.4 indicate that food and income interventions alone are insufficient without parallel investment in health, water, and sanitation systems. And across all three contexts, the

scale of the region wide funding shortfall documented by OCHA (2026) and WFP (2026) suggests that even well targeted, sociologically informed interventions will remain constrained without a substantial increase in humanitarian financing, particularly for the livelihood support programming that current data show reaching only 6 percent of its target population.

Limitations

As a desk-based study relying on secondary and published data, this research does not involve direct household level measurement and cannot establish the precise magnitude of livelihood capital or social capital loss with the granularity that primary survey or asset-based data would allow; its contribution lies instead in identifying differentiated qualitative patterns across sites for future primary research to test. The active security constraints that necessitated this design also mean that some sources, particularly advocacy and faith-based reporting on Madagali, carry a specific framing that required cautious, corroboration-dependent treatment. Finally, because the 2024–2026 resurgence remains ongoing at the time of writing, the study's findings reflect a snapshot of an evolving livelihood and food security crisis rather than a settled post-conflict assessment.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the Boko Haram insurgency's 2024–2026 resurgence has affected the livelihood and food security of rural households in Northeast Nigeria, treating the conflict as the causal shock rather than the object of study. Comparing livelihood and food security conditions in Gujba, Madagali, and Kukawa LGAs, each exposed to a structurally different violence pattern, corridor focused military target ambush, chronic civilian raiding, and mass casualty catastrophe, reveals that violence type shapes which livelihood capitals are most acutely depleted and which food security pillar is most directly threatened: financial and physical capital and an access and stability food security crisis in Gujba; natural and human capital and an availability and utilization crisis in Madagali; human capital, linking capital, and the most severe availability collapse of the three in Kukawa. This differentiation matters because no prior study has systematically compared livelihood and food security outcomes across LGAs experiencing structurally different insurgency violence patterns, and because it has direct implications for how humanitarian and recovery programming should be designed, not as a uniform conflict response package, but as livelihood and food security specific interventions tailored to the particular capital losses each community context produces. With 4.8 million people across the BAY states facing Crisis-level or worse food insecurity as of March 2026, and funding for the response covering barely one-fortieth of documented need, the stakes of getting this differentiation right, for the design of interventions that rebuild the human, natural, physical, financial, and social capital on which

durable rural livelihoods and food security depend, could not be higher.

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