STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO ACHIEVE BETTER HUMANITARIAN OUTCOMES IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

Kaduna state has faced increasing security challenges in the past two decades, ranging from terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and natural disasters, which have had devastating effects on human lives and property. The need for an effective response mechanism to manage and mitigate such disasters gave rise to the increasing role of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) as a critical institution in ensuring security and humanitarian response. However, despite NEMA, the recurring crises not only caused widespread displacement and destruction but also hindered socio-economic development in Kaduna state. Therefore, the study proposed strategies for improving NEMA's emergency response to achieve better humanitarian outcomes in Kaduna State. The study was situated within Structural Functionalist theory. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 399 respondents through questionnaires, and interviews with relevant stakeholders. Data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The findings revealed that strengthening collaboration among the stakeholders is critical for enhancing coordination, improving early warning systems, and ensuring timely responses. Furthermore, integrating livelihood support and peace building initiatives into NEMA's interventions will transform its operations from short-term humanitarian relief to long-term conflict prevention and recovery. The research recommends increased and sustained government funding for NEMA, improved training for staff in conflict-sensitive response, enhanced logistics support, and stronger partnerships with community leaders and civil society organizations. These measures would not only improve NEMA's operational effectiveness but also contribute to building community resilience and promoting sustainable peace and development in Kaduna State and beyond.

Keywords: Disaster, Emergency, Humanitarian and Response

1 Introduction

Disaster and emergency management has become an increasingly critical concern across the globe, particularly in regions prone to both natural and human-induced crises. The effectiveness of any national government in safeguarding lives and livelihoods during emergencies is often measured by the strength and responsiveness of its disaster management institutions. In Nigeria, a country confronted by recurring security threats, communal clashes, terrorism, natural disasters, and large-scale internal displacements, the role of emergency management has become increasingly complex and vital.

Nigeria has faced increasing security challenges in the past two decades, ranging from terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, and natural disasters, which have had devastating effects on human lives and property. Kaduna State, being one of the most socio-economically and religiously diverse states in northern Nigeria, has been a flashpoint for many of these crises. The period between 2015 and 2021 witnessed an alarming rise in security threats such as ethno-religious conflicts in southern Kaduna, bandit attacks in Birnin Gwari, Giwa, and Chikun, as well as herder-farmer clashes across rural communities. These recurring crises not only caused widespread displacement and destruction but also hindered socio-economic development. The need for an effective response mechanism to manage and mitigate such disasters gave rise to the increasing role of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) as a critical institution in ensuring security and humanitarian response (Mashi et al., 2019).

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), established in 1999 by Act 12 as amended by Act 50, is Nigeria's lead institution mandated with coordinating disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Over the years, NEMA has been involved in responses to a wide range of crises, from natural disasters such as floods and epidemics to human-induced emergencies, including terrorist attacks, communal conflicts, and mass displacements arising from banditry and insurgency. One of the agency's most demanding roles has been its intervention in internal security-related emergencies, particularly in the northern region of the country, where large-scale violence and displacement have become frequent.

Kaduna State, located in Nigeria's North - West geopolitical zone, exemplifies this complex emergency landscape. With its history of ethno-religious conflict, armed banditry, and kidnappings, the state has witnessed widespread insecurity and humanitarian consequences. NEMA's role in responding to these challenges through the provision of relief materials, coordination of temporary shelters, rehabilitation efforts, and resilience-building programs warrants critical evaluation. While various interventions have been implemented, questions remain regarding the effectiveness, timeliness, and sustainability of these responses.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of NEMA in curbing security challenges in Kaduna State remains debatable. Several studies and reports have highlighted challenges such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic delays, poor coordination among security and humanitarian agencies, and insufficient early warning systems, all of which have limited the agency's operational efficiency (Raji et al., 2021). Moreover, the growing complexity of security threats, particularly the expansion of non-state armed groups and the widespread nature of kidnappings, has stretched NEMA's capacity beyond its traditional disaster management role. The agency has often been reactive rather than proactive, responding after attacks rather than preventing them. This situation raises questions about NEMA's preparedness and institutional effectiveness in addressing modern security threats that require multidimensional and timely interventions (Okunola et al., 2026).

The period between 2015 and 2021 also marked the administration of different state and federal security strategies aimed at improving coordination between emergency management agencies and security forces. However, the recurring nature of violent incidents in Kaduna State indicates a gap between policy formulation and practical

implementation. It is therefore essential to critically examine the effects of NEMA's interventions during this period, considering the agency's objectives, operational strategies, and impact on curbing insecurity. Understanding these dynamics will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in Nigeria's emergency management system, particularly in volatile regions like Kaduna (Dai & Azhar, 2024).

Given these realities, this study focuses on examining the nature and impact of NEMA's interventions in Kaduna State between 2015 and 2021. It seeks to assess the agency's operational capabilities, its constraints, and the extent to which it has contributed to curbing security challenges in affected communities. The study draws upon both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive evaluation of NEMA's performance in emergency management within a conflict-prone setting.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Disaster management refers to systematic organization, management of resources, and responsibility for dealing with all aspects of emergencies, including disaster prevention and mitigation, as well as disaster preparedness, response, and rehabilitation (Mashi et al., 2019). The importance of effective disaster management has garnered increasing attention in recent years, as the world faces rising vulnerabilities to both natural and human-induced crises. Global data from the past three decades suggests that while the number of fatalities from natural disasters has stabilized at around 80,000 annually, the number of people affected by disasters and the economic losses associated with them have surged (Shakeri et al., 2021). In the 1990s, an annual average of about 200 million people were affected by natural disasters, nearly three times the number during the 1970s (Okunola, 2025). Economic losses from such disasters in the 1990s averaged US$ 63 billion per year, nearly five times higher in real terms compared to the 1970s (Amede &Ejumudo, 2021). Disaster management, therefore, involves dealing with disasters before, during, or after their occurrence, through the combined efforts of various organizations aimed at preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from their effects (Mashi et al., 2019; Shakeri et al., 2021).

For effective disaster management, several structures must be in place. These include planning and forecasting hazards, early warning mechanisms, disaster prevention and control measures, disaster mitigation activities, past disaster damage assessments, and rehabilitation and recovery efforts (Amede &Ejumudo, 2021). Early warning systems are particularly critical, as they help predict and determine the likelihood of disasters like volcanic eruptions, oil spills, and floods, thereby enabling quicker and more effective responses (Okunola, 2025). Disaster prevention and control activities, such as awareness campaigns and response strategies, aim to mitigate injuries, loss of life, and property damage during and after disasters (Okunola & Werners, 2024).

Disaster management is often referred to as disaster recovery management, particularly when events disrupt normal operations or pose a risk to human lives (Dai & Azhar, 2024). Governments and businesses have planned disasters to overcome such catastrophic events and return to normalcy as quickly as possible. These plans typically include identifying potential disasters, creating contingency plans, assembling necessary supplies, and establishing procedures to be followed when a disaster occurs. A comprehensive disaster

management plan should address a broad range of potential events, such as floods, hurricanes, bombings, and disease outbreaks, ensuring flexibility in response. Moreover, disaster management plans often include evacuation procedures, temporary housing arrangements, and the provision of food and medical care to affected individuals (Louw et al., 2019). These plans are regularly reviewed and refined through simulations to identify weaknesses and improve response time and effectiveness (Shakeri et al., 2021).

In the context of NEMA's work in Nigeria, humanitarian intervention is central to disaster management. Humanitarian intervention refers to actions aimed at alleviating human suffering during conflicts, natural disasters, or complex emergencies. These interventions include distributing relief materials such as food, shelter, and medical supplies, offering psychosocial support, protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs), and restoring essential services. In Nigeria, NEMA's interventions during security crises seek to stabilize affected communities by addressing their immediate needs and preventing further violence. Timely and equitable humanitarian aid can build trust, reduce grievances, and restore dignity among displaced populations. However, humanitarian interventions must be conflict-sensitive to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities or triggering new tensions. When poorly executed, interventions can inadvertently fuel conflict, while well-designed, inclusive responses can contribute to peacebuilding and long-term recovery. Therefore, NEMA's humanitarian interventions are viewed as vital for addressing the immediate humanitarian consequences of insecurity and promoting community resilience and stability (Okunola & Werners, 2024).

Humanitarian outcomes, in the context of this study, refer to the results of NEMA's actions that directly alleviate human suffering and enhance the well-being of affected communities. These outcomes include the provision of immediate relief (e.g., food, shelter, and medical care) and long-term support such as livelihood recovery, infrastructure rebuilding, and peacebuilding initiatives. Effective humanitarian outcomes require a combination of emergency relief and sustainable recovery efforts to ensure that communities can rebuild and recover from the devastation caused by disasters or conflicts. These interventions also help prevent further violence by addressing the root causes of insecurity and fostering long-term stability (Raji et al., 2021).

Disasters are typically defined as events that cause significant harm to human life, property, and the environment, whether caused by natural forces or human activities. They often lead to large-scale displacement and widespread damage. In this study, "emergency" refers to a sudden, urgent situation that requires immediate intervention to prevent further harm to individuals and communities. Emergencies can arise from both natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, and human-made crises, such as terrorism or conflict. NEMA's role during emergencies is to rapidly mobilize resources, coordinate relief efforts, and support recovery, helping communities recover from the impact of the crisis (Dai & Azhar, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this study is rooted in Structural Functionalist Theory, which assumes that society is made up of interrelated institutions that work together to maintain stability and order. Each institution, whether political, economic, religious, or humanitarian, plays a specific role essential to the functioning of society. In this study, NEMA is considered a crucial institution whose role is to restore balance during times of

disruption caused by disasters or insecurity. Structural Functionalism posits that if one institution fails to perform its function effectively, other institutions must compensate to prevent systemic collapse. For example, when insecurity disrupts normal life, NEMA's function is to intervene with humanitarian relief, filling the vacuum left by other institutions that may have been weakened by conflict (Falola &Agbola, 2022).

3 Methodology

This study adopts a mixed method research approach, which involves the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Mixed method research is defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) as "an approach to research in the social, behavioural, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (textual or image) data, integrates the two, and draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems." The mixed method approach is especially appropriate for this study because of the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the research topic, which investigates the effects of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in curbing security challenges.

The study adopts probability and non-probability sampling, using random and purposive sampling techniques respectively. The Simple random sampling technique to ensure that every individual in the selected population has an equal chance of being chosen, which enhances the representativeness of the data. The target respondents for the quantitative survey are residents of Kaduna State, particularly individuals from areas affected by security challenges and NEMA interventions. To determine the sample size, the Taro Yamane formula was used:

$n = N/(1 + N(e)^2)$

Where

N = sample size

N = signifies the population under study

E = signifies margined error

Using Taro Yamane's formulas to determine good sample size, the formula is as stated below:

$$\text{Sample Size} = \frac{N}{(1 + N(e)2)}$$

Where

N = population, e = degree of error (0.05)

$$\text{Sample Size} = \frac{8.900000}{1+8,900000(0.05)2}$$

= 399

Therefore, a sample of 399 respondents was surveyed using structured questionnaires across selected local government areas, particularly in zones heavily affected by insecurity and displacement. This provides a statistically valid base for analyzing public perceptions of NEMA's impact.

For the qualitative component, the study adopts non-probability purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting individuals who possess deep insight or direct experience relevant to the study. This technique is appropriate for collecting rich, context-specific information from respondents who are not easily accessible through random sampling. The qualitative respondents include: NEMA staff involved in field operations or coordination roles, Security personnel who worked jointly with NEMA during emergency response operations, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who received NEMA support, Community leaders and stakeholders in affected areas and Representatives from local government disaster committees. Structural questionnaire and in-depth interview were used as the method of data collection. The structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically simple percentages and frequency distribution tables, the results were presented using tables for clarity. While, semi-structured interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This process involves transcription of recorded interviews, manual coding of responses, and grouping of codes into themes and sub-themes that align with the research objectives.

4 Result and Discussion

Based on the data analysis five (5) major themes emerged as the strategies for enhancing NEMA’s response to disaster and humanitarian needs of the affected communities. (1)Greater community involvement (2)Increase government funding (3) Training focus (4)Collaboration and (5**)** Long-term livelihood support.

Table 4.1: Suggested Strategies to Improve NEMA's Response

Item	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Greater community involvement	Yes	280	74.7
	No	55	14.7
	Maybe	40	10.7
	Total	**375**	**100**
Increase government funding	Yes	310	82.7
	No	65	17.3
	Total	**375**	**100**
Training focus	Security	85	22.7
	Peacebuilding	70	18.7
	Disaster management	135	36.0
	Community relations	85	22.7
	Total	**375**	**100**
Collaboration	Local leaders	100	26.7
	Police	85	22.7
	NGOs	115	30.7
	Religious leaders	75	20.0
	Total	**375**	**100**
Long-term livelihood support	Yes	225	60.0
	No	80	21.3
	Not sure	70	18.7
	Total	**375**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Respondents overwhelmingly (82.7%) recommended increased government funding for NEMA, reflecting widespread recognition that money is the lifeline of effective emergency management. Similarly, 74.7% stressed greater community involvement in planning, indicating that affected populations want to play a more active role in shaping interventions that concern them.

When asked about training priorities, 36% suggested disaster management, followed by security (22.7%), community relations (22.7%), and peacebuilding (18.7%). This indicates that technical competence in disaster management is still considered the core skill, but respondents also value broader skills in community engagement and conflict sensitivity.

On partnerships, NGOs (30.7%) and local leaders (26.7%) were seen as the most important collaborators, ahead of police (22.7%) and religious leaders (20%). This suggests that respondents see civil society and community leadership as more effective long-term partners than strictly security-driven approaches.

Finally, 60% advocated long-term livelihood support programs, beyond food aid and temporary shelters. Only 21.3% opposed the idea, and 18.7% were unsure. This confirms that communities want sustainable solutions that help them rebuild lives and reduce dependency, not just short-term emergency handouts.

NEMA Staff in Kaduna State clarified that:

"To improve our emergency response, the first priority is funding. If NEMA is given steady and adequate funding, we can pre-position relief materials, hire more trained staff, and respond faster when crises occur. Another important strategy is training our staff need continuous training not only in disaster management but also in conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. If we can combine humanitarian assistance with peacebuilding skills, our interventions will help reduce tensions instead of just providing temporary relief."

Another NEMA Staff in Kaduna State elucidated that:

"Strengthening collaboration with local communities is key. Too often, interventions fail because we come late or we don't fully understand the local dynamics. If communities are involved in planning and decision-making, they will feel ownership of the process, and the support will be better targeted. We also need stronger partnerships with NGOs, religious leaders, and local security committees. This kind of multi-stakeholder approach will make our work more inclusive and help build resilience at the grassroots level."

A **Senior Military Officer clarified that**

"From a security perspective, NEMA needs more operational support to access fragile regions safely. If they are provided with better logistics like armored vehicles, communication gadgets, and escorts where necessary, they can reach affected areas faster and without exposing staff to danger. Another strategy is joint planning security agencies and NEMA should sit together to design response strategies so that humanitarian relief and security stabilization go hand-in-hand. This will not only improve response time but also build community confidence in both institutions."

A **Community Leader stated that:**

"The best way to improve NEMA's response is to bring communities into the planning stage. We know the local realities better, and if we are consulted, interventions will be more relevant and effective. Another important strategy is for NEMA to provide long-term livelihood support instead of only food and temporary shelter. If people can farm again, send their children to school, or start small businesses, they will be more resilient against future crises. Peacebuilding requires this kind of sustained support, not just short-term emergency aid."

One of the **Internally Displaced Person (IDP) explained that:**

"When NEMA came, they gave us food and mats, and we are grateful. But to really help us, they should also support us to start life again. Many of us lost our farms, shops, and houses. If NEMA and the government can help with farming tools, loans, or skills training, we will not have to depend on relief materials for long. Also, if they work with our youth to create peace programs, it will reduce the violence in our communities. We want help that can last, not just something to eat for one week."

The findings in table 4.1 revealed the strategies for improving NEMA's emergency response to support peacebuilding and community resilience in fragile regions. Respondents strongly emphasized the need for increased government funding, greater community participation, and enhanced partnerships with civil society and local leaders as key strategies for improving NEMA's performance. Over 80% supported more government funding, while 74.7% advocated for stronger community involvement in planning and response. Disaster management training, improved coordination with NGOs, and long-term livelihood support programs were also identified as crucial for building resilience. These findings suggest that beyond immediate relief, NEMA must prioritize sustainability, local ownership, and capacity-building. Strengthening institutional frameworks and fostering trust with communities would allow the agency to move from short-term emergency relief to long-term peacebuilding and resilience.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that strengthening NEMA requires more than just emergency relief operations. There is a pressing need for increased funding, improved institutional collaboration, community engagement, and the integration of livelihood and resilience building programs. With these reforms, NEMA can transition from being a reactive relief provider to a proactive actor in peacebuilding and sustainable crisis management. In this way, the agency will be better positioned to not only alleviate suffering but also contribute meaningfully to restoring peace, rebuilding lives, and fostering resilience in fragile regions of Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made to improve NEMA's response mechanisms:

1. **Increased Government Funding**: It is recommended that the federal and state governments allocate sustained and predictable funding to NEMA to enable it to pre-position relief materials, hire trained staff, and enhance its operational capabilities during crises.

2. **Integration of Livelihood Support Programs**: NEMA should implement livelihood support initiatives, such as vocational training, small business funding, and agricultural rehabilitation, to help displaced individuals regain self-sufficiency and reduce dependency on short-term relief.

3. **Strengthened Community Involvement**: Greater community involvement in planning and decision-making is essential to ensure that NEMA's interventions are more relevant, effective, and sustainable. A participatory approach will also help build trust and foster local ownership of disaster management processes.

4. **Improved Training for Staff**: NEMA staff should receive continuous training, not only in disaster management but also in conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.

This will ensure that their interventions are not just reactive but also contribute to reducing tensions in conflict-prone areas.

5. **Enhanced Partnerships with Civil Society and Local Leaders**: NEMA should prioritize collaboration with local community leaders, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These partnerships will strengthen the agency's operations and provide a more inclusive and effective response to crises.

6. **Better Coordination with Security Agencies**: Joint planning and coordination between NEMA and security agencies will ensure a seamless response to emergencies, improving both the humanitarian and security aspects of the intervention.

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