ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (NEMA) ON HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO SECURITY CRISES IN KADUNA STATE (2015–2021)

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in responding to humanitarian needs arising from security crises in Kaduna State, Nigeria, between 2015 and 2021. Kaduna State has experienced persistent insecurity including banditry, communal conflicts, kidnappings, and ethno - religious violence, resulting in large scale displacement and humanitarian distress. Adopting mixed methods research design, data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions involving NEMA officials, community leaders, and internally displaced persons. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis. Findings reveal that NEMA's interventions in Kaduna State were largely humanitarian in nature, focusing on emergency relief, temporary shelter provision, and coordination of displacement response. While these interventions mitigated immediate suffering, their effectiveness was constrained by inadequate funding, logistical challenges, insecurity, and weak inter agency coordination. The study argues that humanitarian response plays an important stabilizing role in conflict settings but has limited impact on peacebuilding when implemented as short term relief without integrated recovery strategies. The paper concludes that strengthening coordination, community engagement, and conflict sensitive programming is essential for improving humanitarian outcomes in conflict prone regions.

Keywords: Humanitarian response, security crises, and emergency management

1. Introduction

The proliferation of security-related crises across sub-Saharan Africa has increasingly blurred the boundaries between security governance and humanitarian response. Wars, armed robbery, civil conflicts, terrorism, and criminal uprisings have resulted in displacement and human suffering as well as social disunity (NEMA, 2023). Humanitarian institutions are very important in such environment in reducing human suffering, stabilizing communities, and facilitating recovery measures. Nonetheless, the performance of these institutions is highly dependent on its capacity, coordination as well as integration to the wider governance structures.

Nigeria is a very complicated example of a long-term insecurity and humanitarian weakness. The country has been witnessing the deepening of violence in several parts of the country since the early 2000s, with insurgency in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and separatist agitations in the

south (Ngwoke et al., 2020). Kaduna State is a geopolitical zone in Nigeria, which is in the northwest; it has become one of the most affected states. The period in 2015-2021 is marked by the repeated ethno-religious violence in Southern Kaduna, armed bandits in Birnin Gwari and Giwa, mass kidnappings, and communal conflicts in the state that led to massive displacement and humanitarian demand (Lamorde, 2018).

As much as the humanitarian impacts of insecurity need the intervention of non-security institutions, security agencies like the military and the police have the primary duty of ensuring law and order. National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), which is under Act 12 of 1999, is the principal institution in Nigeria on disaster preparedness, disaster response, disaster mitigation, and disaster recovery. Though by its original intent meant to coordinate natural disasters, NEMA has also become increasingly involved in conflict-related humanitarian crises such as displacement due to violence and insecurity. Although this is an enlarged role, little or no research has been done on the part of the humanitarian agencies in stabilizing and peacebuilding in Nigeria although the study has been on military operations and policing strategies (Ugbomhe et al., 2019; Sarkar et al., 2021).

This study addresses this gap by empirically examining NEMA's role in humanitarian response to security crises in Kaduna State between 2015 and 2021. It contributes to the growing literature on the security–humanitarian nexus by assessing how humanitarian interventions shape stabilization efforts in conflict-prone environments.

2. Literature Review

Security crises are increasingly recognized as major drivers of humanitarian emergencies. Violent conflict disrupts livelihoods, destroys infrastructure, and displaces populations, thereby creating urgent humanitarian needs (NEMA, 2023). In fragile states, the humanitarian consequences of insecurity often persist long after active violence subsides, undermining recovery and development (NEMA, 2023).

Humanitarian intervention in conflict environments has been a traditional life-saving intervention, such as food, shelter, and medical aid, and protection of the displaced populations. Although such interventions are imperative, researchers claim that relief-based interventions may be ineffective when focusing on the structural sources of vulnerability without supplementing them with recovery and resilience measures (Mac Ginty, 2018; Stepputat, 2002).

Energy management agencies are very important in coordination of humanitarian response in case of crisis. Institutions like the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States have developed in the developed contexts to be integrated with the risk management models, which have prioritized preparedness, coordination, and community resilience (Kapucu&Boin , 2016). This is the opposite situation in developing countries as emergency management agencies are often characterized by chronic shortage of resources, ineffective institutional capacity, and political interference (Adelekan &Asiyanbi, 2021).

NEMA has taken the center stage in managing disasters in Nigeria since the year 1999. The research on the performance of NEMA identifies the following challenges in its

performance: lack of funding, subpar logistics, bureaucracy and lack of inter-agency coordination (Fasona& Olorunfemi, 2016; Mashi et al., 2019). Yet, most of the literature is devoted to natural disasters; specifically flooding, not much empirical research has been carried out to investigate the role of NEMA in the humanitarian crises caused by a conflict.

This study is grounded in Structural Functional Analysis, a sociological perspective associated with Durkheim and later developed by Parsons. The theory conceptualizes society as a system composed of interdependent institutions that perform functions necessary for social stability (Parsons, 1951, as cited in Sharma, 2024). Disruptions such as conflict and displacement represent dysfunctions that threaten equilibrium, while institutional interventions aim to restore balance. Within this framework, NEMA is conceptualized as a stabilizing institution whose humanitarian interventions mitigate the disruptive effects of insecurity. Effective performance contributes to social stabilization and resilience, while institutional weaknesses such as inadequate resources and poor coordination generate dysfunctions that prolong humanitarian crises (Merton, 1957, as cited in Ibragimov, 2024). Structural Functional Analysis thus provides a useful lens for examining both the contributions and limitations of humanitarian response in conflict-affected contexts.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate comprehensive insights. Data were collected from NEMA officials, community leaders, and internally displaced persons across selected conflict-affected local government areas in Kaduna State. A total of 399 questionnaires were administered, of which 375 valid responses were analyzed. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The coding process involved identifying recurring patterns related to humanitarian interventions, effectiveness, operational challenges, and improvement strategies. Ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

4. Result and Discussion

Based on the responses from the respondents two major themes and sub-themes emerged (1) Respondents awareness and perception of NEMA's role **(a)** Awareness of NEMA's presence (b) Received assistance from NEMA (c) Type of assistance received (d) Speed of response (e) Overall rating of NEMA's role and **2** Impact of NEMA's Intervention (a) NEMA's actions reduce violence(b) People return home after support (c)Feeling of safety due to NEMA(d) Effect of NEMA's presence (e) Change in displacement

4.1 Respondents' Awareness and Perception of NEMA's Role

This section presents respondents' awareness and perception of the role of the National Emergency Management Agency in responding to humanitarian needs arising from security crises in Kaduna State. Understanding public awareness and perception is critical, as it reflects the visibility, accessibility, and perceived effectiveness of

humanitarian institutions in conflict-affected environments. Previous studies have shown that awareness of emergency management agencies significantly influences community trust, cooperation, and utilization of humanitarian assistance during crises (Pelling & Wisner 2012; Tierney, 2022). Accordingly, this section examines respondents' awareness of NEMA's presence, the type of assistance received, speed of response, and overall assessment of the agency's humanitarian role.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Awareness and Perception of NEMA's Role

Item	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Awareness of NEMA's presence	Yes	280	74.7
	No	95	25.3
	Total	**375**	**100**
Received assistance from NEMA	Yes	240	64.0
	No	135	36.0
	Total	**375**	**100**
Type of assistance received	Food	160	42.7
	Shelter	60	16.0
	Medical aid	40	10.7
	Psychosocial support	30	8.0
	None	85	22.7
	Total	**375**	**100**
Speed of response	Very fast	70	18.7
	Fast	140	37.3
	Slow	110	29.3
	Very slow	55	14.7
	Total	**375**	**100**
Overall rating of NEMA's role	Excellent	75	20.0
	Good	135	36.0
	Fair	110	29.3
	Poor	55	14.7
	Total	**375**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results show that about three-quarters (74.7%) of respondents were aware of NEMA's presence in their communities, which suggests that the agency is fairly visible and recognized in crisis-prone areas. However, awareness does not necessarily translate into direct support: only 64% reported receiving actual assistance, leaving a significant 36% who have never benefited. This implies gaps in coverage and inclusiveness, meaning some communities or households remain underserved.

Among those who received aid, the majority (42.7%) mentioned food assistance, while relatively fewer benefited from shelter (16%), medical aid (10.7%), or psychosocial support (8%). This finding highlights NEMA's heavy focus on emergency food relief, while other equally critical interventions such as mental health care and housing rehabilitation appear neglected.

On response speed, more than half (56%) of respondents rated NEMA as “Fast” or “Very fast,” but a notable 44% believed the agency responded “Slow” or “Very slow.” This mixed perception suggests that although some communities benefit from timely interventions, others suffer delays that undermine effectiveness.

Finally, on overall performance, 56% of respondents rated NEMA’s role as “Excellent” or “Good,” while 44% judged it “Fair” or “Poor.” This indicates that while the agency is generally appreciated, there is still considerable dissatisfaction among affected populations, largely due to limited coverage and perceived delays.

A staff from NEMA: the role of NEMA in responding to security challenges and humanitarian crises in Kaduna State stated that:

"In Kaduna State, NEMA has played a frontline role in responding to security-related crises, especially in areas affected by banditry, communal clashes, and mass displacement. Between 2015 and 2021, our interventions included setting up temporary shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs), distributing food and relief materials, and providing basic medical support. In some cases, we worked closely with state emergency agencies and local leaders to ensure displaced persons were identified and assisted. While these interventions have helped to reduce suffering and stabilize communities in the short term, the challenge has always been that our resources are limited compared to the scale of the crises. As such, our role has been more of a humanitarian buffer than a permanent solution to the security problems."

Another staff from NEMA the role of NEMA in responding to security challenges and humanitarian crises in Kaduna State explained that:

“NEMA’s role goes beyond just distributing relief items. In responding to security challenges, we also act as a bridge between affected communities and the government. We provide accurate situation reports, mobilize quick response teams, and sometimes collaborate with security agencies to ensure safe access for aid delivery. However, the reality is that security threats, poor funding, and political interference sometimes reduce our efficiency. For example, in some volatile areas, our teams had to delay entering communities until it was safe, which created perceptions of late response. Despite these obstacles, I believe NEMA has been critical in providing immediate relief and preventing total humanitarian breakdown during crises in Kaduna State.”

A community leader from the affected area in Kaduna State stated that:

“From the perspective of our community, NEMA has been very important in times of crisis. During attacks and mass displacements, their officers came to provide food, temporary shelter, and medical support, which helped many families to survive the immediate shock. They also worked with us as local leaders to identify the most vulnerable households, such as widows and children. However, I must say that their response is sometimes delayed, and the assistance is often not enough for everyone. Many displaced people still rely heavily on relatives or NGOs for long-term support. Overall, NEMA’s presence has brought some relief and hope, but we believe their role would be more effective if they had more resources, better coordination with local agencies, and sustained programs beyond emergency relief.”

The findings show that NEMA plays an important role in providing humanitarian relief in the face of insecurity and displacement in Kaduna State. About three-quarters of respondents were aware of NEMA's presence, and 64% reported receiving direct support in the form of food, shelter, or medical aid. However, the support was often skewed toward food assistance, with limited provision of psychosocial and housing interventions. While more than half of the respondents rated NEMA's performance as "good" or "excellent," a significant minority expressed dissatisfaction, citing delays and inadequate coverage. This supports earlier works such as Pelling (2012) and Alsina & Eldridge (2025), which emphasized that emergency management agencies are crucial for cushioning vulnerable populations against the immediate effects of crises. However, the study also shows that NEMA's interventions are mostly short-term and inadequate to address the root causes of insecurity. This aligns with Tierney's (2022) critique that emergency responses in developing countries often fail to transition into long-term resilience building due to limited resources and governance weaknesses. Within the lens of Structural Functionalism, NEMA is performing its function of restoring balance, but its constrained capacity weakens the broader societal system's ability to achieve stability.

4.2 Impact of NEMA's Interventions

This section examines the perceived impact of NEMA's humanitarian interventions on security-related outcomes and displacement patterns in affected communities. While humanitarian agencies are not mandated to provide security enforcement, their interventions can influence stabilization, community confidence, and displacement dynamics in conflict settings (Muriuki, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2018). The section therefore assesses respondents' perceptions of whether NEMA's actions contribute to reduced violence, encourage return to communities, enhance feelings of safety, and influence displacement trends. This analysis provides insight into the extent to which humanitarian response contributes to short-term stabilization and longer-term peacebuilding efforts.

Table 4.2: Impact of NEMA's Interventions

Item	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
NEMA's actions reduce violence	Yes	210	56.0
	No	100	26.7
	Not sure	65	17.3
	Total	**375**	**100**
People return home after support	Yes	140	37.3
	No	120	32.0
	Sometimes	115	30.7
	Total	**375**	**100**
Feeling of safety due to NEMA	Much safer	95	25.3
	Slightly safer	140	37.3
	Not safer at all	140	37.3
	Total	**375**	**100**
Effect of NEMA's presence	Peace restoration	120	32.0
	Temporary relief	155	41.3
	No effect	80	21.3

	Other	20	5.3
	Total	**375**	**100**
Change in displacement	Big change	105	28.0
	Small change	145	38.7
	No change	125	33.3
	Total	**375**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Just over half (56%) of respondents believe that NEMA's actions directly reduce violence, compared to 26.7% who disagreed and 17.3% who were unsure. This finding suggests that while NEMA is recognized as contributing to stabilization, its impact is not strong or universal. The perception of uncertainty also reflects communication gaps and possibly inconsistent effectiveness across locations.

Regarding displacement, only 37.3% reported that people return home after NEMA's support, while 32% said no, and 30.7% said only sometimes. This demonstrates that NEMA's interventions have limited success in enabling durable resettlement. Instead, displaced persons often continue to live in camps or host communities despite receiving aid.

On perceptions of safety, a combined 62.6% (25.3% "Much safer" and 37.3% "Slightly safer") expressed improved feelings of safety, while a substantial 37.3% felt "Not safer at all." This indicates that while some communities feel reassured by NEMA's presence, others remain vulnerable, reflecting uneven outcomes across the state.

In terms of the main effect of NEMA's presence, the majority (41.3%) felt it only provides temporary relief, while 32% saw it as promoting peace restoration. Alarmingly, 21.3% claimed NEMA had "no effect" at all. This shows that NEMA's contributions are often perceived as short-term stopgaps, rather than structural solutions to insecurity.

Similarly, when asked about displacement, 28% saw a "Big change," 38.7% a "Small change," and 33.3% "No change." This means that while NEMA helps reduce displacement to some extent, the improvements are marginal and insufficient to tackle the full scale of Kaduna's displacement crisis.

Thus, these findings suggest that NEMA's interventions are appreciated but are not yet powerful enough to achieve long-term peace, resettlement, and community security.

NEMA staff was asked on *the extent to which NEMA's interventions have contributed to reducing insecurity and displacement, he explained that*

"From our assessment, NEMA's interventions have contributed to reducing displacement in Kaduna State to some extent. When we provide relief materials and temporary shelters, many displaced families feel safer to remain in designated camps rather than scattering into unsafe areas. In addition, our psychosocial support and coordination with local authorities have helped communities gradually return to their homes after attacks. However, we recognize that these efforts are mostly short-term. Until the root security problems are addressed by security agencies, displacement will continue to reoccur despite our interventions."

A Security Personnel from the study area stated that:

"NEMA's interventions help us in stabilizing situations after security operations. When they move in quickly with food, medicine, and shelter, it reduces tension and prevents people from taking matters into their own hands. For example, in some conflict-prone villages, their support gave residents confidence to return after military clearance. But in truth, NEMA cannot stop insecurity on its own. Their role is humanitarian, not combat. What they do is reduce the humanitarian impact of insecurity and prevent further chaos while we handle the direct security threats."

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): in Southern Kaduna opined that:

"When our village was attacked, we had to run and leave everything behind. It was NEMA that gave us food, mats, and a place to stay in the camp. This made life a bit easier for us. Some families even returned to rebuild after they received help. But many of us are still afraid to go back because the bandits may return. So, NEMA's help reduced our suffering and displacement for a while, but it has not completely solved our insecurity problem. We still need more lasting peace before everyone can go home safely."

A community leader in one of the affected areas in Kaduna State clarified that:

"NEMA's interventions have been very helpful to us in reducing the immediate suffering of displaced people. When attacks happen, their support with food, clothing, and shelter prevents families from scattering further or dying of hunger. In some cases, their presence has encouraged people to return home earlier than expected, because they feel that at least someone is standing with them. However, I must be honest that NEMA's work has not really reduced insecurity itself. The bandits and conflicts are still there. What NEMA has done is to manage the humanitarian side of the crisis, not the security side. So while they reduce displacement temporarily, people still live in fear and many cannot return permanently to their homes until security improves."

The findings revealed the extent to which NEMA's interventions have contributed to reducing insecurity and internal displacement in affected communities. The study revealed that NEMA's interventions are moderately effective in reducing displacement but have limited impact on insecurity itself. Over half (56%) of respondents believed that NEMA's efforts reduce violence, but a considerable proportion (27%) disagreed, while others remained uncertain. Only 37.3% reported that displaced persons returned home after support, showing that resettlement and long-term peace remain weak. Although some respondents felt safer after receiving aid, many still considered NEMA's efforts as offering temporary relief rather than permanent security. The implication is that NEMA's activities mitigate humanitarian suffering but do not directly address the root causes of insecurity, meaning displacement patterns continue despite interventions. These findings are consistent with earlier observations by Muriuki (2017), who argued that emergency institutions help restore order but cannot single-handedly resolve structural insecurity. They also echo the assumption in the Structural Functionalist theory that institutions are interdependent NEMA can reduce the humanitarian impact but cannot replace the role of security agencies in addressing the underlying violence.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of NEMA in responding to humanitarian emergencies induced by security challenges in Kaduna State. Through its interventions, NEMA has effectively alleviated immediate suffering and contributed to stabilizing communities in the short term. However, despite these successes, there are several operational constraints that limit the agency's long-term impact. One of the most significant challenges is the insufficient integration of NEMA's humanitarian efforts with broader peacebuilding initiatives, which are essential for fostering sustainable development and stability. While the agency has done well in providing food, shelter, and basic services, its response mechanisms often fall short of addressing the root causes of conflict, thus limiting the possibility of long-term peace.

The study identifies several policy implications, most notably the need for sustained funding and more robust inter-agency coordination. Effective disaster and conflict management require a more integrated approach, where humanitarian relief is closely linked with strategies for recovery and resilience. A shift towards community-centered approaches, where local populations are actively involved in decision-making, would also enhance the effectiveness of NEMA's interventions. Moreover, there is a clear need to align humanitarian aid with broader conflict management frameworks, ensuring that relief efforts contribute to long-term peacebuilding in conflict-prone regions like Kaduna State. Future research should explore comparative studies across other states to assess the broader impact of NEMA's interventions and how its strategies can be improved to address the evolving nature of security-induced emergencies.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance NEMA's humanitarian response and long-term impact:

1. **Diversifying Relief Services:** NEMA's focus should extend beyond food distribution to include comprehensive services such as psychosocial support, medical care, housing rehabilitation, and education for displaced children. This holistic approach would ensure that affected populations receive the support they need to rebuild their lives, addressing both immediate and long-term needs.

2. **Strengthening Coordination Among Agencies:** Improved coordination between NEMA and other government agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, is essential for ensuring effective and timely responses. Establishing a central hub for disaster and conflict response could streamline efforts, enhance resource allocation, and avoid redundancy in interventions.

3. **Community-Centered Approaches:** NEMA should adopt more inclusive strategies by actively involving affected communities in the planning and execution of humanitarian aid. Empowering local leaders and community groups can improve the relevance and sustainability of relief interventions, ensuring that aid is tailored to the specific needs and context of each area.

4. **Integration of Humanitarian and Peacebuilding Strategies:** There is a pressing need to integrate NEMA's humanitarian efforts with peacebuilding strategies. This includes coordinating relief efforts with local peace initiatives, community dialogue, and conflict resolution programs. Such integration will ensure that aid does not just meet immediate needs but also supports efforts toward lasting peace and stability.

5. **Investing in Long-Term Recovery and Resilience Building:** In addition to immediate relief efforts, NEMA should focus on long-term recovery and resilience-building programs. This includes investing in education, vocational training, and infrastructure development to enable displaced populations to reintegrate into society and rebuild their lives. Strengthening local institutions and governance structures would also enhance community resilience to future crises.

By addressing these recommendations, NEMA can enhance its capacity to manage security-induced emergencies and contribute to sustainable peace and development in Kaduna State and similar conflict-prone regions.

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