

PREVENTING ESCALATION: YOUTH-INFORMED EARLY WARNING AND NON-KINETIC PEACEBUILDING IN PLATEAU STATE

Advancing Inclusive Dialogue and Preventive Responses to Resource-Based Conflict



A Policy Brief by

Engaging Borders Strategy Research and Development (SRD)

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ABOUT THE DELIMI PROSPER PROJECT

The Delimi PROSPER Project is an eight-month initiative implemented by Engaging Borders Strategy Research and Development (SRD) under the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING) Programme. The project focuses on addressing resource-based conflict in Kaduna and Plateau States through non-kinetic, community-driven peacebuilding approaches.

Operating at the intersection of youth engagement, digital advocacy, and policy dialogue, the project strengthens local capacity to detect, prevent, and counter divisive narratives linked to competition over land, water, and environmental resources. It places particular emphasis on youth leadership, gender equity, and the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Through Community Peacebuilding Workshops, digital campaigns, Communities of Practice, Peace Public Square engagements, and executive policy dialogues, the project generates practical insights that connect grassroots experiences with state-level decision-making.

The policy briefs in this series synthesise evidence from SPRING-commissioned research alongside youth-generated perspectives captured through project activities, offering policy-relevant options for strengthening preventive and inclusive peacebuilding approaches.

ABOUT ENGAGING BORDERS SRD

Engaging Borders Strategy Research and Development (SRD) is a Nigerian policy and peacebuilding organisation dedicated to advancing evidence-informed, inclusive, and locally grounded approaches to conflict prevention and resilience.

The organisation works at the intersection of research, youth engagement, digital advocacy, and high-level policy dialogue, translating community experiences into practical strategies for government and institutional actors.

Engaging Borders SRD collaborates with state institutions, civil society organisations, security actors, and development partners to design and implement non-kinetic interventions that strengthen social cohesion and democratic accountability.

Through rigorous analysis, structured dialogue platforms, and adaptive learning frameworks, the organisation supports sustainable pathways to peace and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

DISCLAIMER

This publication was produced under the Delimi PROSPER Project with support from the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING) Programme, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

The views and analyses presented in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily

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All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. However, Engaging Borders SRD accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions.



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IN PLATEAU STATE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief examines the drivers and escalation patterns of resource-based conflict in Plateau State and highlights the strategic value of institutionalised early warning and non-kinetic prevention mechanisms. Drawing on SPRiNG-commissioned research and youth-generated insights from the Delimi PROSPER Project, it identifies systemic vulnerabilities and actionable policy options for government agencies, security actors, CSOs, development partners, and media stakeholders.

Evidence indicates that resource disputes in Plateau frequently intersect with identity narratives, historical grievances, land competition, and misinformation. Escalation is often rapid, with rumours amplifying tensions before formal mediation mechanisms can intervene. While security responses are necessary during crisis periods, preventive structures remain under-institutionalised.

Youth consultations reveal that early warning signals (shifts in rhetoric, market tensions, digital rumour patterns, and social segregation) are often visible at the community level long before violence erupts. Women and persons with disabilities provide additional insight into subtle trust breakdowns and psychosocial stress indicators that formal systems may overlook.

This brief outlines policy options that strengthen state-level preventive architecture, including structured early warning systems, institutionalised dialogue platforms, trauma-informed support mechanisms, and youth-led digital counter-narratives. It argues that sustainable stability in Plateau requires moving from episodic containment to structured prevention embedded within governance frameworks.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Plateau State has long experienced cycles of intercommunal violence linked to land use, settlement patterns, and identity-based mobilisation. Resource-based disputes, particularly over farmland, grazing access, and territorial claims, frequently intersect with ethnic and religious narratives, deepening mistrust and polarisation. Environmental stress, demographic shifts, and economic hardship further complicate these tensions. As access to land and livelihood opportunities becomes more constrained, disputes that might once have been manageable through traditional mediation increasingly escalate into wider communal confrontations.

A recurring challenge in Plateau is the speed of escalation. Rumours (often spread through digital platforms, religious networks, or informal community channels) can rapidly transform isolated incidents into perceived collective threats. In several instances, misinformation has outpaced official clarification, contributing to retaliatory

cycles. While security interventions have played an important role in containing violence, preventive and non-kinetic mechanisms remain inconsistently institutionalised. Early warning signals are often visible within communities before violence erupts, yet structured systems for capturing and responding to those signals are limited.

Youth occupy a central role in this landscape. They are active in digital spaces, deeply embedded in social networks, and both affected by and influential within conflict dynamics. However, their perspectives and capacities are not systematically integrated into state-level prevention strategies.

If escalation cycles continue without strengthened preventive infrastructure, Plateau risks recurring instability, economic disruption, and erosion of intercommunal trust. Preventing escalation requires institutionalised early warning, inclusive mediation frameworks, and sustained community-state partnership mechanisms.



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WHAT THE DATA SHOWS (EVIDENCE BASE)

SPRiNG-commissioned research across North-Central Nigeria highlights recurring patterns in Plateau's conflict dynamics: resource competition, governance gaps, identity mobilisation, and weak preventive architecture converge to produce episodic violence. Research on farmer-herder conflict mitigation demonstrates that land pressure and environmental variability significantly increase dispute frequency. Where local dispute-resolution mechanisms lack neutrality or legitimacy, grievances accumulate and are easily mobilised along identity lines.

Studies examining social cohesion and frontline justice indicate that delays in early mediation often allow narratives of bias or victimisation to solidify. Once polarisation hardens, even minor incidents can trigger widespread unrest.

Further evidence shows that misinformation functions as a conflict accelerator. Digital and informal rumour networks amplify fear and perceived threat, particularly in areas with historical grievances. In Plateau's context, rumour verification mechanisms are often informal and inconsistent. Importantly, SPRiNG-supported community-based trauma counselling initiatives demonstrate the stabilising value of psychosocial resilience mechanisms. The training of 240 counsellors and the establishment of 63 community listening centres across affected states strengthened early identification of trauma triggers, improved referral systems, and enhanced community trust. Trauma-informed approaches reduce grievance retention and support recovery after violent episodes.

Research on localisation of peacebuilding further indicates that traditional institutions, women's networks, youth groups, and community associations play critical roles in early detection of tension shifts. However, these actors are rarely formally integrated into state-level early warning frameworks.

The evidence suggests that preventing escalation on the Plateau requires structured mechanisms that link community-level insights with state-level response capacity.



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WHAT THE YOUTH LENS ADDS

Through Community Peacebuilding Workshops, Communities of Practice, digital advocacy engagements, and Peace Public Square dialogues, youth participants in Plateau consistently highlight how escalation unfolds in real time.

1. They identify subtle early warning indicators: changes in market interactions, segregation at social events, inflammatory sermons, online rumour spikes, and increased “us versus them” rhetoric. These signals often precede visible violence by days or weeks.
2. Youth report that digital misinformation spreads faster than corrective messaging. In many cases, WhatsApp groups and local influencers serve as primary sources of information, making rapid verification systems critical.

3. Young participants emphasise that trust deficits between communities and state institutions complicate preventive response. Where mediation platforms are perceived as biased, grievances intensify.

Women and persons with disabilities contribute additional insight into psychosocial stress patterns (withdrawal, increased hostility, and fear behaviours) that may signal rising tension before public incidents occur.

This experiential evidence complements existing and strengthens policy relevance by demonstrating how structural drivers manifest in everyday interactions. They also highlight the opportunity to harness youth networks within a structured early warning and prevention system.



GENDER, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GEDSI) CONSIDERATIONS

Conflict impacts in Plateau are not uniform. Women often experience both direct and indirect consequences of violence, including displacement, livelihood disruption, and psychosocial trauma. At the same time, women's associations frequently act as informal mediators and early warning channels. Persons with disabilities face heightened vulnerability during

conflict, particularly regarding mobility, information access, and safety. Including disability leadership in community-based initiatives enhances accessibility and legitimacy. Youth exclusion (whether economic or political) can intensify susceptibility to mobilisation. Inclusive preventive frameworks that integrate youth, women, and disability leadership strengthen community trust and sustainability.



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IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The convergence of research findings and youth insight suggests that Plateau's stability depends on strengthening preventive architecture rather than relying primarily on reactive containment. Institutionalised early warning systems that formally link community actors with State response mechanisms can reduce escalation timelines. Trust-building measures are not peripheral but central to effective security governance. Failure to capture and respond to early warning signals risks recurring violence, economic disruption, and reputational costs. Conversely,

structured prevention mechanisms can reduce pressure on security forces and lower long-term response costs. Psychosocial resilience is also a strategic consideration. Trauma-informed support reduces grievance retention and improves recovery after incidents.

For Plateau State, the opportunity lies in embedding community insights into formal governance structures, strengthening inclusive mediation platforms, and enhancing digital rumour management capacity.



POLICY OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Option 1: Institutionalise State–Community Early Warning Frameworks

Formalise reporting channels linking youth networks, traditional leaders, women’s associations, and security actors.

Benefit: Faster detection and response.

Consideration: Requires coordination protocols and trust safeguards.

Option 2: Strengthen Interfaith and Intercommunal Dialogue Platforms

Support recurring structured dialogue forums across high-risk LGAs.

Benefit: Reduces polarisation and the escalation of rumours.

Consideration: Must ensure neutrality.

Option 3: Expand Trauma-Informed Community Support

Scale community-based listening centres and psychosocial training.

Benefit: Strengthens long-term resilience.

Consideration: Requires trained personnel and referral pathways.

Option 4: Youth-Led Digital Monitoring and Counter-Narratives

Engage youth networks in rumour verification and positive messaging.

Benefit: Slows misinformation-driven escalation.

Consideration: Requires digital safety protocols.

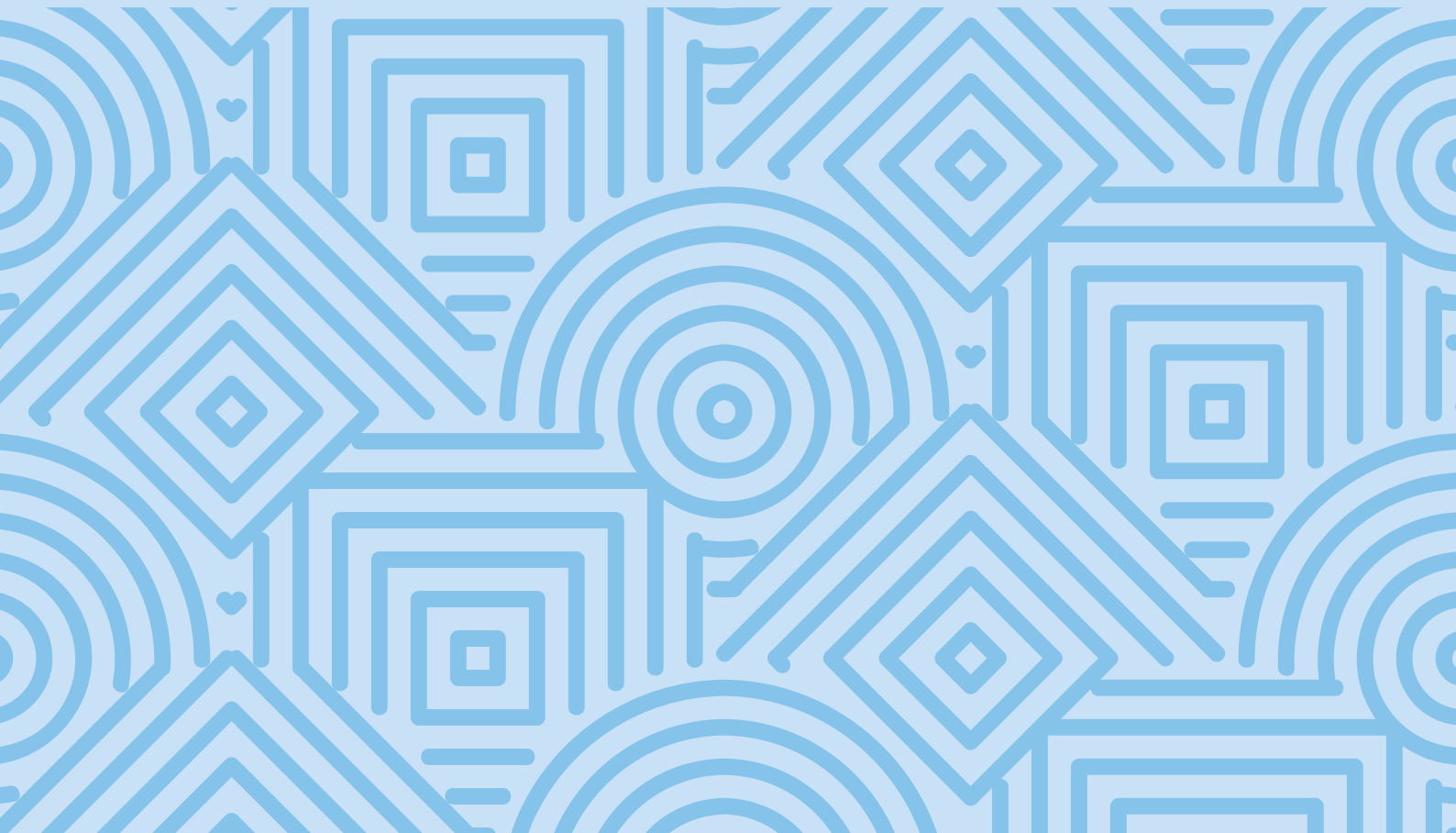
Option 5: Integrate GEDSI Benchmarks in Peace Architecture

Embed inclusion indicators in State peace frameworks.

Benefit: Enhances legitimacy and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Preventing escalation in Plateau State requires moving from episodic responses to an institutionalised preventive architecture. Evidence and youth insights demonstrate that structured early warning systems, inclusive mediation platforms, trauma-informed support, and digital narrative management are mutually reinforcing components of stability. Embedding these mechanisms within governance structures enhances trust, reduces recurrence risks, and consolidates peace gains. These pathways offer practical, evidence-informed options for strengthening long-term resilience in Plateau State.







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